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BY

ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER BENSON
FELLOW OF MAGDALENE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

47778

Haec ego mecum

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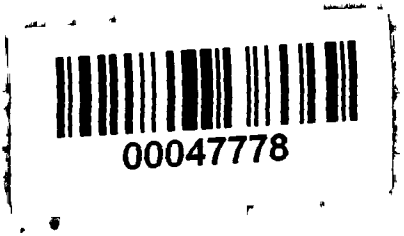

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* The papers denoted by an asterisk appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine*, 1907 and 1908.

AT LARGE

I

THE SCENE

YES, of course it is an experiment! But it is made *in corpore vili*. It is not irreparable, and there is no reason, more's the pity, why I should not please myself. I will ask—it is a rhetorical question which needs no answer—what is a hapless bachelor to do, who is professionally occupied and tied down in a certain place for just half the year? What is he to do with the other half? I cannot live on in my college rooms, and I am not compelled to do so for economy. I have near relations and many friends, at whose houses I should be made welcome. But I cannot be like the wandering dove, who found no repose. I have a great love of my independence and my liberty. I love my own fireside, my own chair, my own books, my own way. It is little short of torture to have to conform to the rules of other households, to fall in with other people's arrangements, to throw my pen down when the gong sounds, to make myself agreeable to

fortuitous visitors, to be led whither I would not. I do this, a very little, because I do not desire to lose touch with my kind; but then my work is of a sort which brings me into close touch day after day with all sorts of people, till I crave for recollection and repose; the prospect of a round of visits is one that fairly unmans me. No doubt it implies a certain want of vitality, but one does not increase one's vitality by making overdrafts upon it; and then too I am a slave to my pen, and the practice of authorship is inconsistent with paying visits. Of course the obvious remedy is marriage; but one cannot marry from prudence, or from a sense of duty, or even to increase the birth-rate, which I am concerned to see is diminishing. I am, moreover, to be perfectly frank, a transcendentalist on the subject of marriage. I know that a happy marriage is the finest and noblest thing in the world, and I would resign all the conveniences I possess with the utmost readiness for it. But a great passion cannot be the result of reflection, or of desire, or even of hope. One cannot argue oneself into it; one must be carried away. "You have never let yourself go," says a wise and gentle aunt, when I bemoan my unhappy fate. To which I reply that I have never done anything else. I have lain down in streamlets, I have leapt into silent pools, I have made be-

lieve I was in the presence of a deep emotion, like the dear little girl in one of Reynolds's pictures, who hugs a fat and lolling spaniel over an inch-deep trickle of water, for fear he should be drowned. I do not say that it is not my fault. It is my fault, my own fault, my own great fault, as we say in the Compline confession. The fault has been an over-sensibility. I have desired close and romantic relations so much that I have dissipated my forces; yet when I read such a book as the love-letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, I realise at once both the supreme nature of the gift, and the hopelessness of attaining it unless it be given; but I try to complain, as the beloved mother of Carlyle said about her health, as little as possible.

Well, then, as I say, what is a reluctant bachelor who loves his liberty to do with himself? I cannot abide the life of towns, though I live in a town half the year. I like friends, and I do not care for acquaintances. There is no conceivable reason why, in the pursuit of pleasure, I should frequent social entertainments that do not amuse me. What have I then done? I have done what I liked best. I have taken a big roomy house in the quietest country I could find, I have furnished it comfortably, and I have hitherto found no difficulty in inducing my friends, one or two at a time, to come and share my life.

I shall have something to say about solitude presently, but meanwhile I will describe my hermitage.

The old Isle of Ely lies in the very centre of the Fens. It is a range of low gravel hills, shaped roughly like a human hand. The river runs at the wrist, and Ely stands just above it, at the base of the palm, the fingers stretching out to the west. The fens themselves, vast peaty plains, the bottoms of the old lagoons, made up of the accumulation of centuries of rotting water-plants, stretch round it on every side; far away you can see the low heights of Brandon, the Newmarket Downs, the Gogmagogs behind Cambridge, the low wolds of Huntingdon. To the north the interminable plain, through which the rivers welter and the great levels run, stretches up to the Wash. So slight is the fall of the land towards the sea, that the tide steals past me in the huge Hundred-foot cut, and makes itself felt as far south as Earith Bridge, where the Ouse comes leisurely down with its clear pools and reed-beds. At the extremity of the southernmost of all the fingers of the Isle, a big hamlet clusters round a great ancient church, whose blunt tower is visible for miles above its grove of sycamores. More than twelve centuries ago an old saint, whose name I think was Owen, though it was Latinised by the monks into Ovinus, because he had the

care of the sheep, kept the flocks of St. Etheldreda, queen and abbess of Ely, on these wolds. One does not know what were the visions of this rude and ardent saint, as he paced the low heights day by day, looking over the monstrous lakes. At night no doubt he heard the cries of the marsh-fowl and saw the elfin lights stir on the reedy flats. Perhaps some touch of fever kindled his visions; but he raised a tiny shrine here, and here he laid his bones; and long after, when the monks grew rich, they raised a great church here to the memory of the shepherd of the sheep, and beneath it, I doubt not, he sleeps.

What is it I see from my low hills? It is an enchanted land for me, and I lose myself in wondering how it is that no one, poet or artist, has ever wholly found out the charm of these level plains, with their rich black soil, their straight dykes, their great drift-roads, that run as far as the eye can reach into the unvisited fen. In summer it is a feast of the richest green from verge to verge; here a clump of trees stands up, almost of the hue of indigo, surrounding a lonely shepherd's cote; a distant church rises, a dark tower over the hamlet elms; far beyond, I see low wolds, streaked and dappled by copse and wood; far to the south, I see the towers and spires of Cambridge, as of some spiritual city—the smoke rises over it on still days, hanging like

a cloud; to the east lie the dark pine-woods of Suffolk, to the north an interminable fen; but not only is it that one sees a vast extent of sky, with great cloud-battalions crowding up from the south, but all the colour of the landscape is crowded into a narrow belt to the eye, which gives it an intensity of emerald hue that I have seen nowhere else in the world. There is a sense of deep peace about it all, the herb of the field just rising in its place over the wide acres; the air is touched with a lazy fragrance, as of hidden flowers; and there is a sense, too, of silent and remote lives, of men that glide quietly to and fro in the great pastures, going quietly about their work in a leisurely calm. In the winter it is fairer still, if one has a taste for austerity. The trees are leafless now; and the whole flat is lightly washed with the most delicate and spare tints, the pasture tinted with the yellowing bent, the pale stubble, the rich plough-land, all blending into a subdued colour; and then, as the day declines and the plain is rimmed with a frosty mist, the smouldering glow of the orange sunset begins to burn clear on the horizon, the grey laminated clouds becoming ridged with gold and purple, till the whole fades, like a shoaling sea, into the purest green, while the cloud-banks grow black and ominous, and far-off lights twinkle like stars in solitary farms.

Of the house itself, exteriorly, perhaps the less said the better; it was built by an earl, to whom the estate belonged, as a shooting-box. I have often thought that it must have been ordered from the Army and Navy Stores. It is of yellow brick, blue-slated, and there has been a pathetic feeling after giving it a meanly Gothic air; it is ill-placed, shut in by trees, approached only by a very dilapitated farm-road; and the worst of it is that a curious and picturesque house was destroyed to build it. It stands in what was once a very pretty and charming little park, with an ancient avenue of pollard trees, lime and elm. You can see the old terraces of the Hall, the mounds of ruins, the fish-ponds, the grass-grown pleasance. It is pleasantly timbered, and I have an orchard of honest fruit-trees of my own. First of all I expect it was a Roman fort; for the other day my gardener brought me in half of the handle of a fine old Roman water-jar, red pottery smeared with plaster, with two pretty laughing faces pinched lightly out under the volutes. A few days after I felt like Polycrates of Samos, that over-fortunate tyrant, when, walking myself in my garden, I descried and gathered up the rest of the same handle, the fractures fitting exactly. There are traces of Roman occupation hereabouts in mounds and earthworks. Not long ago a man ploughing in the fen struck

an old red vase up with the share, and searching the place found a number of the same urns within the space of a few yards, buried in the peat, as fresh as the day they were made. There was nothing else to be found, and the place was under water till fifty years ago; so that it must have been a boatload of pottery being taken in to market that was swamped there, how many centuries ago! But there have been stranger things than that found; half a mile away, where the steep gravel hill slopes down to the fen, a man hoeing brought up a bronze spear-head. He took it to the lord of the manor, who was interested in curiosities. The squire hurried to the place and had it all dug out carefully; quite a number of spear-heads were found, and a beautiful bronze sword, with the holes where the leather straps of the handle passed in and out. I have held this fine blade in my hands, and it is absolutely undinted. It may be Roman, but it is probably earlier. Nothing else was found, except some mouldering fragments of wood that looked like spear-staves; and this, too, it seems, must have been a boatload of warriors, perhaps some raiding party, swamped on the edge of the lagoon with all their unused weapons, which they were presumably unable to recover, if indeed any survived to make the attempt. Hard by is the place where the great

fight related in *Hereward the Wake* took place. The Normans were encamped southwards at Willingham, where a line of low entrenchments is still known as Belsar's Field, from Belisarius, the Norman Duke in command. It is a quiet enough place now, and the yellow-hammers sing sweetly and sharply in the thick thorn hedges. The Normans made a causeway of faggots and earth across the fen, but came at last to the old channel of the Ouse, which they could not bridge; and here they attempted to cross in great flat-bottomed boats, but were foiled by Hereward and his men, their boats sunk, and hundreds of stout warriors drowned in the oozy river-bed. There still broods for me a certain horror over the place, where the river in its confined channel now runs quietly, by sedge and willow-herb and golden-rod, between its high flood banks, to join the Cam to the east.

But to return to my house. It was once a monastic grange of Ely, a farmstead with a few rooms, no doubt, where sick monks and ailing novices were sent to get change of air and a taste of country life. There is a bit of an old wall still bordering my garden, and a strip of pale soil runs across the gooseberry beds, pale with dust of mortar and chips of brick, where another old wall stood. There was a great pigeon-house here, pulled down for the shooting-

box, and the garden is still full of old carved stones, lintels, and mullions, and capitals of pillars, and a grotesque figure of a bearded man, with a tunic confined round the waist by a cord, which crowns one of my rockeries. But it is all gone now, and the pert cockneyfied house stands up among the shrubberies and walnuts, surveying the ruins of what has been.

But I must not abuse my house, because whatever it is outside, it is absolutely comfortable and convenient within: it is solid, well built, spacious, sensible, reminding one of the "solid joys and lasting treasure" that the hymn says "none but Zion's children know." And, indeed, it is a Zion to be at ease in.

One other great charm it has: from the end of my orchard the ground falls rapidly in a great pasture. Some six miles away, over the dark expanse of Grunty Fen, the towers of Ely, exquisitely delicate and beautiful, crown the ridge; on clear sunny days I can see the sun shining on the lead roofs, and the great octagon rises with all its fretted pinnacles. Indeed, so kind is Providence, that the huge brick mass of the Ely water-tower, like an overgrown Temple of Vesta, blends itself pleasantly with the cathedral, projecting from the western front like a great Galilee.

The time to make pious pilgrimage to Ely is when the apple-orchards are in bloom. Then the

grim western tower, with its sombre windows, the gabled roofs of the canonical houses, rise in picturesque masses over acres of white blossom. But for me, six miles away, the cathedral is a never-ending sight of beauty. On moist days it draws nearer, as if carved out of a fine blue stone; on a grey day it looks more like a fantastic crag, with pinnacles of rock. Again it will loom a ghostly white against a thunder-laden sky. Grand and pathetic at once, for it stands for something that we have parted with. What was the outward and stately form of a mighty idea, a rich system, is now little more than an æsthetic symbol. It has lost heart, somehow, and its significance only exists for ecclesiastically or artistically minded persons; it represents a force no longer in the front of the battle.

One other fine feature of the countryside there is, of which one never grows tired. If one crosses over to Sutton, with its huge church, the tower crowned with a noble octagon, and the village pleasantly perched along a steep ridge of orchards, one can drop down to the west, past a beautiful old farmhouse called Berristead, with an ancient chapel, built into the homestead, among fine elms. The road leads out upon the fen, and here run two great Levels, as straight as a line for many miles, up which the tide pulsates day by day; between them lies a wide tract of pasture called

the Wash, which in summer is a vast grazing-ground for herds, in rainy weather a waste of waters, like a great estuary—north and south it runs, crossed by a few roads or black-timbered bridges, the fen-water pouring down to the sea. It is a great place for birds this. The other day I disturbed a brood of redshanks here, the parent birds flying round and round, piping mournfully, almost within reach of my hand. A little further down, not many months ago, there was observed a great commotion in the stream, as of some big beast swimming slowly; the level was netted, and they hauled out a great sturgeon, who had somehow lost his way, and was trying to find a spawning-ground. There is an ancient custom that all sturgeon, netted in English waters, belong by right to the sovereign; but no claim was advanced in this case. The line between Ely and March crosses the level, further north, and the huge freight-trains go smoking and clanking over the fen all day. I often walk along the grassy flood-bank for a mile or two, to the tiny decayed village of Mepal, with a little ancient church, where an old courtier lies, an Englishman, but with property near Lisbon, who was a gentleman-in-waiting to James II. in his French exile, retired invalided, and spent the rest of his days "between Portugal and Byall Fen"—an odd pair of localities to be so conjoined!

And what of the life that it is possible to live in my sequestered grange? I suppose there is not a quieter region in the whole of England. There are but two or three squires and a few clergy in the Isle, but the villages are large and prosperous; the people eminently friendly, shrewd and independent, with homely names for the most part, but with a sprinkling both of Saxon appellations, like Cutlack, which is Guthlac a little changed, and Norman names, like Camps, inherited perhaps from some invalided soldier who made his home there after the great fight. There is but little communication with the outer world; on market-days a few trains dawdle along the valley from Ely to St. Ives and back again. They are fine, sturdy, prosperous village communities, that mind their own business, and take their pleasure in religion and in song, like their forefathers the fenmen, Girvii, who sang their three-part catches with rude harmony.

Part of the charm of the place is, I confess, its loneliness. One may go for weeks together with hardly a caller; there are no social functions, no festivities, no gatherings. One may once in a month have a chat with a neighbour, or take a cup of tea at a kindly parsonage. But people tend to mind their own business, and live their own lives in their own circle; yet there is an air of tranquil neighbourliness all about. The

inhabitants of the region respect one's taste in choosing so homely and serene a region for a dwelling-place, and they know that whatever motive one may have had for coming, it was not dictated by a feverish love of society. I have never known a district—and I have lived in many parts of England—where one was so naturally and simply accepted as a part of the place. One is greeted in all directions with a comfortable cordiality, and a natural sort of good-breeding; and thus the life comes at once to have a precise quality, a character of its own. Every one is independent, and one is expected to be independent too. There is no suspicion of a stranger; it is merely recognised that he is in search of a definite sort of life, and he is made frankly and unostentatiously at home.

And so the days race away there in the middle of the mighty plain. No plans are ever interrupted, no one questions one's going and coming as one will, no one troubles his head about one's occupations or pursuits. Any help or advice that one needs is courteously and readily given, and no favours asked or expected in return. One little incident gave me considerable amusement. There is a private footpath of my own which leads close to my house; owing to the house having stood for some time unoccupied, people had tended to use it as a short cut. The kindly farmer obviated

this by putting up a little notice-board, to indicate that the path was private. A day or two afterwards it was removed and thrown into a ditch. I was perturbed as well as surprised by this, supposing that it showed that the notice had offended some local susceptibility; and being very anxious to begin my tenure on neighbourly terms, I consulted my genial landlord, who laughed, and said that there was no one who would think of doing such a thing; and to reassure me he added that one of his men had seen the culprit at work, and that it was only an old horse, who had rubbed himself against the post till he had thrown it down.

The days pass, then, in a delightful monotony; one reads, writes, sits or paces in the garden, scours the country on still sunny afternoons. There are many grand churches and houses within a reasonable distance, such as the great churches near Wisbech and Lynn—West Walton, Walpole St. Peter, Tilney, Terrington St. Clement, and a score of others—great cruciform structures, in every conceivable style, with fine woodwork and noble towers, each standing in the centre of a tiny rustic hamlet, built with no idea of prudent proportion to the needs of the places they serve, but out of pure joy and pride. There are houses like Beaupré, a pile of fantastic brick, haunted by innumerable phantoms, with its stately orchard

closes, or the exquisite gables of Snore Hall, of rich Tudor brickwork, with fine panelling within. There is no lack of shrines for pilgrimage—then, too, it is not difficult to persuade some like-minded friend to share one's solitude. And so the quiet hours tick themselves away in an almost monastic calm, while one's book grows insensibly day by day, as the bulrush rises on the edge of the dyke.

I do not say that it would be a life to live for the whole of a year, and year by year. There is no stir, no eagerness, no brisk interchange of thought about it. But for one who spends six months in a busy and peopled place, full of duties and discussions and conflicting interests, it is like a green pasture and waters of comfort. The danger of it, if prolonged, would be that things would grow languid, listless, fragrant like the Lotos-eaters' Isle; small things would assume undue importance, small decisions would seem unduly momentous; one would tend to regard one's own features as in a mirror and through a magnifying glass. But, on the other hand, it is good, because it restores another kind of proportion; it is like dipping oneself in the seclusion of a monastic cell. Nowadays the image of the world, with all its sheets of detailed news, all its network of communications, sets too deep a mark upon one's spirit. We tend to believe that a man is lost unless he is overwhelmed with occupation,

unless, like the conjurer, he is keeping a dozen balls in the air at once. Such a gymnastic teaches a man alertness, agility, effectiveness. But it has got to be proved that one was sent into the world to be effective, and it is not even certain that a man has fulfilled the higher law of his being if he has made a large fortune by business. A sagacious, shrewd, acute man of the world is sometimes a mere nuisance; he has made his prosperous corner at the expense of others, and he has only contrived to accumulate, behind a little fence of his own, what was meant to be the property of all. I have known a good many successful men, and I cannot honestly say that I think that they are generally the better for their success. They have often learnt self-confidence, the shadow of which is a good-natured contempt for ineffective people; the shadow, on the other hand, which falls on the contemplative man is an undue diffidence, an indolent depression, a tendency to think that it does not very much matter what any one does. But, on the other hand, the contemplative man sometimes does grasp one very important fact—that we are sent into the world, most of us, to learn something about God and ourselves; whereas if we spend our lives in directing and commanding and consulting others, we get so swollen a sense of our own importance, our own adroitness, our own

effectiveness, that we forget that we are tolerated rather than needed. It is better on the whole to tarry the Lord's leisure, than to try impatiently to force the hand of God, and to make amends for His apparent slothfulness. What really makes a nation grow, and improve, and progress, is not social legislation and organisation. That is only the sign of the rising moral temperature; and a man who sets an example of soberness, and kindliness, and contentment is better than a pragmatical district visitor with a taste for rating meek persons.

It may be asked, then, do I set myself up as an example in this matter? God forbid! I live thus because I like it, and not from any philosophical or philanthropical standpoint. But if more men were to follow their instincts in the matter, instead of being misled and bewildered by the conventional view that attaches virtue to perspiration, and national vigour to the multiplication of unnecessary business, it would be a good thing for the community. What I claim is that a species of mental and moral equilibrium is best attained by a careful proportion of activity and quietude. What happens in the case of the majority of people is that they are so much occupied in the process of acquisition that they have no time to sort or dispose their stores; and thus life, which ought to be a thing complete in itself, and ought to be spent, partly in gathering materials, and

partly in drawing inferences, is apt to be a hurried accumulation lasting to the edge of the tomb. We are put into the world, I cannot help feeling, to *be* rather than to *do*. We excuse our thirst for action by pretending to ourselves that our own doing may minister to the being of others; but all that it often effects is to inoculate others with the same restless and feverish bacteria.

And anyhow, as I said, it is but an experiment. I can terminate it whenever I have the wish to do so. Even if it is a failure, it will at all events have been an experiment, and others may learn wisdom by my mistake; because it must be borne in mind that a failure in a deliberate experiment in life is often more fruitful than a conventional success. People as a rule are so cautious; and it is of course highly disagreeable to run a risk, and to pay the penalty. Life is too short, one feels, to risk making serious mistakes; but, on the other hand, the cautious man often has the catastrophe, without even having had the pleasure of a run for his money. Jowett, the high priest of worldly wisdom, laid down as a maxim, "Never resign"; but I have found myself that there is no pleasure comparable to disentangling oneself from uncongenial surroundings, unless it be the pleasure of making mild experiments and trying unconventional schemes.

II

CONTENTMENT

I HAVE attempted of late, in more than one book, to depict a certain kind of tranquil life, a life of reflection rather than of action, of contemplation rather than of business; and I have tried to do this from different points of view, though the essence has been the same. I endeavoured at first to do it anonymously, because I have no desire to recommend these ideas as being my own theories. The personal background rather detracts from than adds to the value of the thoughts, because people can compare my theories with my practice, and show how lamentably I fail to carry them out. But time after time I have been pulled reluctantly out of my burrow, by what I still consider a wholly misguided zeal for publicity, till I have decided that I will lurk no longer. It was in this frame of mind that I published, under my own name, a book called *Beside Still Waters*, a harmless enough volume, I thought, which was meant to be a deliberate summary or manifesto of these ideas. It depicted a young man who, after a reasonable experience

of practical life, resolved to retire into the shade, and who in that position indulged profusely in leisurely reverie. The book was carefully enough written, and I have been a good deal surprised to find that it has met with considerable disapproval, and even derision, on the part of many reviewers. It has been called morbid and indolent, and decadent, and half a hundred more ugly adjectives. Now I do not for an instant question the right of a single one of these conscientious persons to form whatever opinion they like about my book, and to express it in any terms they like; they say, and obviously feel, that the thought of the book is essentially thin, and that the vein in which it is written is offensively egotistical. I do not dispute the possibility of their being perfectly right. An artist who exhibits his paintings, or a writer who publishes his books, challenges the criticisms of the public; and I am quite sure that the reviewers who frankly disliked my book, and said so plainly, thought that they were doing their duty to the public, and warning them against teaching which they believed to be insidious and even immoral. I honour them for doing this, and I applaud them, especially if they did violence to their own feelings of courtesy and urbanity in doing so. Then there were some good-natured reviewers who practically said that the book was simply a collection of amiable platitudes; but that if the public liked

to read such stuff, they were quite at liberty to do so. I admire these reviewers for a different reason, partly for their tolerant permission to the public to read what they choose, and still more because I like to think that there are so many intelligent people in the world who are wearisomely familiar with ideas which have only slowly and gradually dawned upon myself. I have no intention of trying to refute or convince my critics, and I beg them with all my heart to say what they think about my books, because only by the frank interchange of ideas can we arrive at the truth.

But what I am going to try to do in this chapter is to examine the theory by virtue of which my book is condemned, and I am going to try to give the fullest weight to the considerations urged against it. I am sure there is something in what the critics say, but I believe that where we differ is in this. The critics who disapprove of my book seem to me to think that all men are cast in the same mould, and that the principles which hold good for some necessarily hold good for all. What I like best about their criticisms is that they are made in a spirit of moral earnestness and ethical seriousness. I am a serious man myself, and I rejoice to see others serious. The point of view which they seem to recommend is the point of view of a certain kind of practical

strenuousness, the gospel of push, if I may so call it. They seem to hold that people ought to be discontented with what they are, that they ought to try to better themselves, that they ought to be active, and what they call normal; that when they have done their work as energetically as possible, they should amuse themselves energetically, too, take hard exercise, shout and play,

> "Pleased as the Indian boy to run
> And shoot his arrows in the sun,"

and that then they should recreate themselves like Homeric heroes, eating and drinking, listening comfortably to the minstrel, and take their fill of love in a full-blooded way.

That is, I think, a very good theory of life for some people, though I think it is a little barbarous; it is Spartan rather than Athenian.

Some of my critics take a higher kind of ground, and say that I want to minimise and melt down the old stern beliefs and principles of morality into a kind of nebulous emotion. They remind me a little of an old country squire of whom I have heard, of the John Bull type, whose younger son, a melancholy and sentimental youth, joined the Church of Rome. His father was determined that this should not separate them, and asked him to come home and talk it over. He told his eldest son that he was going to remonstrate with

the erring youth in a simple and affectionate way. The eldest son said that he hoped his father would do it tactfully and gently, as his brother was highly sensitive, to which his father replied that he had thought over what he meant to say, and was going to be very reasonable. The young man arrived, and was ushered into the study by his eldest brother. "Well," said the squire, "very glad to see you, Harry; but do you mean to tell me that your mother's religion is not good enough for a d——d ass like you?"

Now far from desiring to minimise faith in God and the Unseen, I think it is the thing of which the world is more in need than anything else. What has made the path of faith a steep one to tread is partly that it has got terribly encumbered with ecclesiastical traditions; it has been mended, like the Slough of Despond, with cartloads of texts and insecure definitions. And partly too the old simple undisturbed faith in the absolute truth and authority of the Bible has given way. It is admitted that the Bible contains a considerable admixture of the legendary element; and it requires a strong intellectual and moral grip to build one's faith upon a collection of writings, some of which, at all events, are not now regarded as being historically and literally true. "If I cannot believe it all," says the simple bewildered soul, "how can I be certain that any of it is

indubitably true?" Only the patient and desirous spirit can decide; but whatever else fades, the perfect insight, the Divine message of the Son of Man cannot fade; the dimmer that the historical setting becomes, the brighter shine the parables and the sayings, so far beyond the power of His followers to have originated, so utterly satisfying to our deepest needs. What I desire to say with all my heart is that we pilgrims need not be dismayed because the golden clue dips into darkness and mist; it emerges as bright as ever upon the upward slope of the valley. If one disregards all that is uncertain, all that cannot be held to be securely proved in the sacred writings, there still remain the essential facts of the Christian revelation, and more deep and fruitful principles than a man can keep and make his own in the course of a lifetime, however purely and faithfully he lives and strives. To myself the doubtful matters are things absolutely immaterial, like the *débris* of the mine, while the precious ore gleams and sparkles in every boulder.

What, in effect, these critics say is that a man must not discuss religion unless he is an expert in theology. When I try, as I have once or twice tried, to criticise some current conception of a Christian dogma, the theological reviewer, with a titter that resembles the titter of Miss Squeers in *Nicholas Nickleby*, says that a writer who pre-

sumes to discuss such questions ought to be better acquainted with the modern developments of theology. To that I demur, because I am not attempting to discuss theology, but current conceptions of theology. If the advance in theology has been so enormous, then all I can say is that the theologians fail to bring home the knowledge of that progress to the man in the street. To use a simple parable, what one feels about many modern theological statements is what the eloquent bagman said in praise of the Yorkshire ham: "Before you know where you are, there—it's wanished!" This is not so in science; science advances, and the ordinary man knows more or less what is going on; he understands what is meant by the development of species, he has an inkling of what radio-activity means, and so forth; but this is because science is making discoveries, while theological discoveries are mainly of a liberal and negative kind, a modification of old axioms, a loosening of old definitions. Theology has made no discoveries about the nature of God, or the nature of the soul; the problem of free will and necessity is as dark as ever, except that scientific discovery tends to show more and more that an immutable law regulates the smallest details of life. I honour, with all my heart, the critics who have approached the Bible in the same spirit in which they approach other literature; but the only definite result has

been to make what was considered a matter of blind faith more a matter of opinion. But to attempt to scare men away from discussing religious topics, by saying that it is only a matter for experts, is to act in the spirit of the Inquisition. It is like saying to a man that he must not discuss questions of diet and exercise because he is not acquainted with the Pharmacopœia, or that no one may argue on matters of current politics unless he is a trained historian. Religion is, or ought to be, a matter of vital and daily concern for every one of us; if our moral progress and our spiritual prospects are affected by what we believe, theologians ought to be grateful to any one who will discuss religious ideas from the current point of view, if it only leads them to clear up misconceptions that may prevail. If I needed to justify myself further, I would only add that since I began to write on such subjects I have received a large number of letters from unknown people, who seem to be grateful to any one who will attempt to speak frankly on these matters, with the earnest desire, which I can honestly say has never been absent from my mind, to elucidate and confirm a belief in simple and essential religious principles.

And now I would go on to say a few words as to the larger object which I have had in view. My aim has been to show how it is possible for

people living quiet and humdrum lives, without any opportunities of gratifying ambition or for taking a leading part on the stage of the world, to make the most of simple conditions, and to live lives of dignity and joy. My own belief is that what is commonly called success has an insidious power of poisoning the clear springs of life; because people who grow to depend upon the stimulus of success sink into dreariness and dulness when that stimulus is withdrawn. Here my critics have found fault with me for not being more strenuous, more virile, more energetic. It is strange to me that my object can have been so singularly misunderstood. I believe, with all my heart, that happiness depends upon strenuous energy; but I think that this energy ought to be expended upon work, and everyday life, and relations with others, and the accessible pleasures of literature and art. The gospel that I detest is the gospel of success, the teaching that every one ought to be discontented with his setting, that a man ought to get to the front, clear a space round him, eat, drink, make love, cry, strive, and fight. It is all to be at the expense of feebler people. That is a detestable ideal, because it is the gospel of tyranny rather than the gospel of equality. It is obvious, too, that such success depends upon a man being stronger than his fellows, and is only made possible by shoving and

hectoring, and bullying the weak. The preaching of this violent gospel has done us already grievous harm; it is this which has tended to depopulate country districts, to make people averse to discharging all honest subordinate tasks, to make men and women overvalue excitement and amusement. The result of it is the lowest kind of democratic sentiment, which says, "Every one is as good as every one else, and I am a little better," and the jealous spirit, which says, "If I cannot be prominent, I will do my best that no one else shall be." Out of it develops the demon of municipal politics, which makes a man strive for a place, in the hope of being able to order things for which others have to pay. It is this teaching which makes power seem desirable for the sake of personal advantages, and with no care for responsibility. This spirit seems to me an utterly vile and detestable spirit. It tends to disguise its rank individualism under a pretence of desiring to improve social conditions. I do not mean for a moment to say that all social reformers are of this type; the clean-handed social reformer, who desires no personal advantage, and whose influence is a matter of anxious care, is one of the noblest of men; but now that schemes of social reform are fashionable, there are a number of blatant people who use them for purposes of personal advancement.

What I rather desire is to encourage a very

different kind of individualism, the individualism of the man who realises that the hope of the race depends upon the quality of the life, upon the number of people who live quiet, active, gentle, kindly, faithful lives, enjoying their work and turning for recreation to the nobler and simpler sources of pleasure—the love of nature, poetry, literature, and art. Of course the difficulty is that we do not, most of us, find our pleasures in these latter things, but in the excitement and amusement of social life. I mournfully admit it, and I quite see the uselessness of trying to bring pleasures within the reach of people when they have no taste for them; but an increasing number of people do care for such things, and there are still more who would care for them, if only they could be introduced to them at an impressionable age.

If it is said that this kind of simplicity is a very tame and spiritless thing, I would answer that it has the advantage of being within the reach of all. The reason why the pursuit of social advancement and success is so hollow, is that the subordinate life is after all the life that must fall to the majority of people. We cannot organise society on the lines of the army of a lesser German state, which consisted of twenty-four officers, covered with military decorations, and eight privates. The successful men, whatever happens, must be

a small minority; and what I desire is that success, as it is called, should fall quietly and inevitably on the heads of those who deserve it, while ordinary people should put it out of their thoughts. It is no use holding up an ideal which cannot be attained, and which the mere attempt to attain is fruitful in disaster and discontent.

I do not at all wish to teach a gospel of dulness. I am of the opinion of the poet who said:

> "Life is not life at all without delight,
> Nor hath it any might."

But I am quite sure that the real pleasures of the world are those which cannot be bought for money, and which are wholly independent of success.

Every one who has watched children knows the extraordinary amount of pleasure that they can extract out of the simplest materials. To keep a shop in the corner of a garden, where the commodities are pebbles and thistle-heads stored in old tin pots, and which are paid for in daisies, will be an engrossing occupation to healthy children for a long summer afternoon. There is no reason why that kind of zest should not be imported into later life; and, as a matter of fact, people who practise self-restraint, who are temperate and quiet, do retain a gracious kind of contentment in all that they do or say, or think,

to extreme old age; it is the jaded weariness of overstrained lives that needs the stimulus of excitement to carry them along from hour to hour. Who does not remember the rigid asceticism of Ruskin's childhood? A bunch of keys to play with, and a little later a box of bricks; the Bible and *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe* to read; a summary whipping if he fell down and hurt himself, or if he ever cried. Yet no one would venture to say that this austerity in any way stunted Ruskin's development or limited his range of pleasures; it made him perhaps a little submissive and unadventurous. But who that ever saw him, as the most famous art-critic of the day, being mercilessly snubbed, when he indulged in paradoxes, by the old wine-merchant, or being told to hold his tongue by the grim old mother, and obeying cheerfully and sweetly, would have preferred him to have been loud, contradictory, and self-assertive? The mischief of our present system of publicity is that we cannot enjoy our own ideas, unless we can impress people with them, or, at all events, impress people with a sense of our enjoyment of them. There is a noble piece of character-drawing in one of Mr. Henry James's novels, *The Portrait of a Lady*, where Gilbert Osmond, a selfish dilettante, finding that he cannot make a great success or attain a great position, devotes

himself to trying to mystify and provoke the curiosity of the world by retiring into a refined seclusion, and professing that it affords him an exquisite kind of enjoyment. The hideous vulgarity of his attitude is not at first sight apparent; he deceives the heroine, who is a considerable heiress, into thinking that here, at last, is a man who is living a quiet and sincere life among the things of the soul; and having obtained possession of her purse, he sets up house in a dignified old palace in Rome, where he continues to amuse himself by inviting distinguished persons to visit him, in order that he may have the pleasure of excluding the lesser people who would like to be included.

This is, of course, doing the thing upon an almost sublime scale; but the fact remains that in an age which values notoriety above everything except property, a great many people do suffer from the disease of not enjoying things, unless they are aware that others envy their enjoyment. To people of an artistic temperament this is a sore temptation, because the essence of the artistic temperament is its egotism, and egotism, like the Bread-and-butter fly, requires a special nutriment, the nutriment of external admiration.

And here, I think, lies one of the pernicious results of an over-developed system of athletics.

The more games that people play, the better; but I do not think it is wholesome to talk about them for large spaces of leisure time, any more than it is wholesome to talk about your work or your meals. The result of all the talk about athletics is that the newspapers get full of them too. That is only natural. It is the business of newspapers to find out what interests people, and to tell them about it; but the bad side of it is that young athletes get introduced to the pleasures of publicity, and that ambitious young men think that athletics are a short cut to fame. To have played in a University eleven is like accepting a peerage; you wear for the rest of your life an agreeable and honourable social label, and I do not think that a peerage is deserved, or should be accepted, at the age of twenty. I do not think it is a good kind of fame which depends on a personal performance rather than upon a man's usefulness to the human race.

The kind of contentment that I should like to see on the increase is the contentment of a man who works hard and enjoys work, both in itself and in the contrast it supplies to his leisure hours; and, further, whose leisure is full of varied interests, not only definite pursuits, but an interest in his relations with others, not only of a spectatorial kind, but with the natural and

instinctive desire to contribute to their happiness, not in a priggish way, but from a sense of cordial good-fellowship.

This programme may seem, as I have said, to be unambitious and prosaic, and to have very little that is stirring about it. But my belief is that it can be the most lively, sensitive, fruitful, and enjoyable programme in the world, because the enjoyment of it depends upon the very stuff of life itself, and not upon skimming the cream off and throwing away the milk.

My critics will say that I am only appearing again from my cellar, with my hands filled with bottled platitudes; but if they are platitudes, by which I mean plain and obvious truths, why do we not find more people practising them? What I mean by a platitude is a truth so obvious that it is devoid of inspiration, and has become one of the things that every one does so instinctively, that no reminder of them is necessary. Would that it were so in the present case! All I can say is that I know very few people who live their lives on these lines, and that most of the people I know find inspiration anywhere but in the homely stuff of life. Of course there are a good many people who take life stolidly enough, and do not desire inspiration at all; but I do not mean that sort of life in the least. I mean that it ought to be possible and delightful for people to live lives

full of activity and perception and kindliness and joy, on very simple lines indeed; to take up their work day by day with an agreeable sense of putting out their powers, to find in the pageant of nature an infinite refreshment, and to let art and poetry lift them up into a world of hopes and dreams and memories; and thus life may become a meal to be eaten with appetite, with a wholesome appreciation of its pleasant savours, rather than a meal eaten in satiety or greediness, with a peevish repining that it is not more elaborate and delicate.

I do not claim to live my own life on these lines. I started, as all sensitive and pleasure-loving natures do, with an expectation of finding life a much more exciting, amusing, and delightful thing than I have found it. I desired to skip from peak to peak, without troubling to descend into the valleys. But now that I have descended, partly out of curiosity and partly out of inefficiency, no doubt, into the low-lying vales, I have found them to be beautiful and interesting places, the hedgerows full of flower and leaf, the thickets musical with the voices of birds, the orchards loaded with fruit, the friendly homesteads rich with tranquil life and abounding in quiet friendly people; and then the very peaks themselves, past which my way occasionally conducts me, have a beautiful solemnity of pure outline and strong

upliftedness, seen from below, which I think they tend to lose, seen from the summit; and if I have spoken of the quieter joys, it is—I can say this with perfect honesty—because I have been pleased with them, as a bird is pleased with the sunshine and the berries, and sings, not that the passers-by may admire his notes, but out of simple joy of heart; and, after all, it is enough justification, if a pilgrim or two have stopped upon their way to listen with a smile. That alone persuades me that one does no harm by speaking, even if there are other passers-by who say what a tiresome note it is, that they have heard it a hundred times before, and cannot think why the stupid bird does not vary his song. Personally, I would rather hear the yellow-hammer utter his sharp monotonous notes, with the dropping cadence at the end, than that he should try to imitate the nightingale.

However, as I have said, I am quite willing to believe that the critics speak, or think they speak, in the interests of the public, and with a tender concern that the public should not be bored. And I will take my leave of them by saying, like Miss Flite, that I will ask them to accept a blessing, and that when I receive a judgment, I shall confer estates impartially.

But my last word shall be to my readers, and

I will beg of them not to be deceived either by experts or by critics; on the one hand, not to be frightened away from speculating and reflecting about the possible meanings of life by the people who say that no one under the degree of a Bachelor of Divinity has any right to tackle the matter; and, on the other hand, I would implore them to believe that a quiet life is not necessarily a dull life, and that the cutting off of alcohol does not necessarily mean a lowering of physical vitality; but rather that if they will abstain for a little from dependence upon excitement, they will find their lives flooded by a new kind of quality, which heightens perception and increases joy. Of course souls will ache and ail, and we have to bear the burden of our ancestors' weaknesses as well as the burden of our own; but just as, in the physical region, diet and exercise and regularity can effect more cures than the strongest medicines, so, in the life of the spirit, self-restraint and deliberate limitation and tranquil patience will often lead into a vigorous and effective channel the stream that, left to itself, welters and wanders among shapeless pools and melancholy marshes.

III

FRIENDSHIP

To make oneself beloved, says an old French proverb, *this is, after all, the best way to be useful.* That is one of the deep sayings which children think flat, and which young men, and even young women, despise; and which a middle-aged man hears with a certain troubled surprise, and wonders if there is not something in it after all; and which old people discover to be true, and think with a sad regret of opportunities missed, and of years devoted, how unprofitably, to other kinds of usefulness! The truth is that most of us who have any ambitions at all, do not start in life with a hope of being useful, but rather with an intention of being ornamental. We think, like Joseph in his childish dreams, that the sun and moon and the eleven stars, to say nothing of the sheaves, are going to make obeisance to us. We want to be impressive, rich, beautiful, influential, admired, envied; and then, as we move forward, the visions fade. We have to be content if, in a quiet corner, a single sheaf gives us a nod of recognition; and as for the eleven stars, they seem unaware of our very existence! And then

we make further discoveries; that when we have seemed to ourselves most impressive, we have only been pretentious; that riches are only a talisman against poverty, and even make suffering and pain and grief more unendurable; that beauty fades into stolidity or weariness; that influence comes mostly to people who do not pursue it, and that the best kind of influence belongs to those who do not even know that they possess it; that admiration is but a brilliant husk, which may or may not contain a wholesome kernel; and as for envy, there is poison in that cup! And then we become aware that the best crowns have fallen to those who have not sought them, and that simple-minded and unselfish people have won the prize which has been denied to brilliance and ambition.

That is the process which is often called disillusionment; and it is a sad enough business for people who only look at one side of the medal, and who brood over the fact that they have been disappointed and have failed. For such as these, there follow the faded years of cynicism and dreariness. But that disillusionment, that humiliation, are the freshest and most beautiful things in the world, for people who have real generosity of spirit, and whose vanity has been of a superficial kind; because they thus realise that these great gifts are real and true things, but that they must be deserved and not captured; and then perhaps such people

begin their life-work afresh, in a humble and hopeful spirit; and if it be too late for them to do what they might have once done, they do not waste time in futile regret, but are grateful for ever so little love and tenderness. After all, they have lived, they have learnt by experience; and it does not yet appear what we shall be. Somewhere, far hence — who knows?—we shall make a better start.

Some philosophers have devoted time and thought to tracing backwards all our emotions to their primal origin; and it is undoubtedly true that in the intensest and most passionate relationships of life—the love of a man for a woman, or a mother for a child — there is a large admixture of something physical, instinctive, and primal. But the fact also remains that there are unnumbered relationships between all sorts of apparently incongruous persons, of which the basis is not physical desire, or the protective instinct, and is not built up upon any hope of gain or profit whatsoever. All sorts of qualities may lend a hand to strengthen and increase and confirm these bonds; but what lies at the base of all is simply a sort of vital congeniality. The friend is the person whom one is in need of, and by whom one is needed. Life is a sweeter, stronger, fuller, more gracious thing for the friend's existence, whether he be near or far: if the friend is close at hand, that is best; but if he

is far away, he is still there, to think of, to wonder about, to hear from, to write to, to share life and experience with, to serve, to honour, to admire, to love. But again it is a mistake to think that one makes a friend because of his or her qualities; it has nothing to do with qualities at all. If the friend has noble qualities, we admire them because they are his; if he has obviously bad and even noxious faults, how readily we condone them or overlook them! It is the person that we want, not what he does or says, or does not do or say, but what he is: that is eternally enough.

Of course, it does sometimes happen that we think we have made a friend, and on closer acquaintance we find things in him that are alien to our very being; but even so, such a friendship often survives, if we have given our heart, or if affection has been bestowed upon us—affection which we cannot doubt. Some of the richest friendships of all are friendships between people whose whole view of life is sharply contrasted; and then what blessed energy can be employed in defending one's friend, in explaining him to other people, in minimising faults, in emphasising virtues! "While the thunder lasted," says the old Indian proverb, "two bad men were friends." That means that a common danger will sometimes draw even malevolent people together. But, for most of us, the only essential thing to friendship is a kind of

mutual trust and confidence. It does not even shake our faith to know that our friend may play other people false: we feel by a kind of secret instinct that he will not play us false; and even if it be proved incontestably that he has played us false, why, we believe that he will not do so again, and we have all the pleasure of forgiveness.

Who shall explain the extraordinary instinct that tells us, perhaps after a single meeting, that this or that particular person in some mysterious way matters to us? The person in question may have no attractive gifts of intellect or manner or personal appearance; but there is some strange bond between us; we seem to have shared experience together, somehow and somewhere; he is interesting, whether he speaks or is silent, whether he agrees or disagrees. We feel that in some secret region he is congenial. *Est mihi nescio quid quod me tibi temperat astrum*, says the old Latin poet—"There is something, I know not what, which yokes our fortunes, yours and mine." Sometimes indeed we are mistaken, and the momentary nearness fades and grows cold. But it is not often so. That peculiar motion of the heart, that secret joining of hands, is based upon something deep and vital, some spiritual kinship, some subtle likeness.

Of course, we differ vastly in our power of attracting and feeling attraction. I confess that, for myself, I never enter a new company without

the hope that I may discover a friend, perhaps *the* friend, sitting there with an expectant smile. That hope survives a thousand disappointments; yet most of us tend to make fewer friends as time goes on, partly because we have not so much emotional activity to spare, partly because we become more cautious and discreet; and partly, too, because we become more aware of the responsibilities which lie in the background of a friendship, and because we tend to be more shy of responsibility. Some of us become less romantic and more comfortable; some of us become more diffident about what we have to give in return; some of us begin to feel that we cannot take up new ideas—none of them very good reasons perhaps; but still, for whatever reason, we make friends less easily. The main reason probably is that we acquire a point of view, and it is easier to keep to that, and fit people in who accommodate themselves to it, than to modify the point of view with reference to the new personalities. People who deal with life generously and large-heartedly go on multiplying relationships to the end.

Of course, as I have said, there are infinite grades of friendship, beginning with the friendship which is a mere *camaraderie* arising out of habit and proximity; and every one ought to be capable of forming this last relationship. The modest man, said Stevenson, finds his friend-

ships ready-made; by which he meant that if one is generous, tolerant, and ungrudging, then, instead of thinking the circle in which one lives inadequate, confined, and unsympathetic, one gets the best out of it, and sees the lovable side of ordinary human beings. Such friendships as these can evoke perhaps the best and simplest kind of loyalty. It is said that in countries where oxen are used for ploughing in double harness, there are touching instances of an ox pining away, and even dying, if he loses his accustomed yoke-fellow. There are such human friendships, sometimes formed on a blood relationship, such as the friendship of a brother and a sister; and sometimes a marriage transforms itself into this kind of *camaraderie*, and is a very blessed, quiet, beautiful thing.

And then there are infinite gradations, such as the friendships of old and young, pupils and masters, parents and children, nurses and nurslings, employers and servants, all of them in a way unequal friendships, but capable of evoking the deepest and purest kinds of devotion: such famous friendships have been Carlyle's devotion to his parents, Boswell's to Johnson, Stanley's to Arnold; till at last one comes to the typical and essential thing known specially as friendship—the passionate, devoted, equal bond which exists between two people of the same age and sex;

many of which friendships are formed at school and college, and which often fade away in a sort of cordial glow, implying no particular communion of life and thought. Marriage is often the great divorcer of such friendships, and circumstances generally, which sever and estrange; because, unless there is a constant interchange of thought and ideas, increasing age tends to emphasise differences. But there are instances of men, like Newman and FitzGerald, who kept up a sort of romantic quality of friendship to the end.

I remember the daughter of an old clergyman of my acquaintance telling me a pathetic and yet typical story of the end of one of these friendships. Her father and another elderly clergyman had been devoted friends in boyhood and youth. Circumstances led to a suspension of intercourse, but at last, after a gap of nearly thirty years, during which the friends had not met, it was arranged that the old comrade should come and stay at the vicarage. As the time approached, her father grew visibly anxious, and coupled his frequent expression of the exquisite pleasure which the visit was going to bring him with elaborate arrangements as to which of his family should be responsible for the entertainment of the old comrade at every hour of the day: the daughters were to lead him out walking in the morning, his wife was to take him out drives in the afternoon, and

he was to share the smoking-room with a son, who was at home, in the evenings—the one object being that the old gentleman should not have to interrupt his own routine, or bear the burden of entertaining a guest; and he eventually contrived only to meet him at meals, when the two old friends did not appear to have anything particular to say to each other. When the visit was over, her father used to allude to his guest with a half-compassionate air: "Poor Harry, he has aged terribly—I never saw a man so changed, with such a limited range of interests; dear fellow, he has quite lost his old humour. Well, well! it was a great pleasure to see him here. He was very anxious that we should go to stay with him, but I am afraid that will be rather difficult to manage; one is so much at a loose end in a strange house, and then one's correspondence gets into arrears. Poor old Harry! What a lively creature he was up at Trinity, to be sure!" Thus with a sigh dust is committed to dust.

"What passions our friendships were!" said Thackeray to FitzGerald, speaking of University days. There is a shadow of melancholy in the saying, because it implies that for Thackeray at all events that kind of glow had faded out of life. Perhaps—who knows?—he had accustomed himself, with those luminous, observant, humorous eyes, to look too deep into the heart of man, to

study too closely and too laughingly the seamy side, the strange contrast between man's hopes and his performances, his dreams and his deeds. Ought one to be ashamed if that kind of generous enthusiasm, that intensity of admiration, that vividness of sympathy die out of one's heart? Is it possible to keep alive the warmth, the colour of youth, suffusing all the objects near it with a lively and rosy glow? Some few people seem to find it possible, and can add to it a kind of rich tolerance, a lavish affectionateness, which pierces even deeper, and sees even more clearly, than the old partial idealisation. Such a large-hearted affection is found as a rule most often in people whose lives have brought them into intimate connection with their fellow-creatures—in priests, doctors, teachers, who see others not in their guarded and superficial moments, but in hours of sharp and poignant emotion. In many cases the bounds of sympathy narrow themselves into the family and the home—because there only are men brought into an intimate connection with human emotion; because to many people, and to the Anglo-Saxon race in particular, emotional situations are a strain, and only professional duty, which is a strongly rooted instinct in the Anglo-Saxon temperament, keeps the emotional muscles agile and responsive.

Another thing which tends to extinguish friend-

ships is that many of the people who desire to form them, and who do form them, wish to have the pleasures of friendship without the responsibilities. In the self-abandonment of friendship we become aware of qualities and strains in the friend which we do not wholly like. One of the most difficult things to tolerate in a friend are faults which are similar without being quite the same. A common quality, for instance, in the Anglo-Saxon race, is a touch of vulgarity, which is indeed the quality that makes them practically successful. A great many Anglo-Saxon people have a certain snobbishness, to give it a hard name; it is probably the poison of the feudal system lurking in our veins. We admire success unduly ; we like to be respected, to have a definite label, to know the right people.

I remember once seeing a friendship of a rather promising kind forming between two people, one of whom had a touch of what I may call "county" vulgarity, by which I mean an undue recognition of "the glories of our birth and state." It was a deep-seated fault, and emerged in a form which is not uncommon among people of that type—namely, a tendency to make friends with people of rank, coupled with a constant desire to detect snobbishness in other people. There is no surer sign of innate vulgarity than that; it proceeds, as a rule, from a dim consciousness of the fault,

combined with the natural shame of a high-minded nature for being subject to it. In this particular case the man in question sincerely desired to resist the fault, but he could not avoid making himself slightly more deferential, and consequently slightly more agreeable, to persons of position. If he had not suffered from the fault, he would never have given the matter a thought at all.

The other partner in the friendly enterprise had a touch of a different kind of snobbishness—the middle-class professional snobbishness, which pays an undue regard to success, and gravitates to effective and distinguished people. As the friendship matured, each became unpleasantly conscious of the other's defect, while remaining unconscious of his own. The result was a perpetual little friction on the point. If both could have been perfectly sincere, and could have confessed their weakness frankly, no harm would have been done. But each was so sincerely anxious to present an unblemished soul to the other's view, that they could not arrive at an understanding on the point; each desired to appear more disinterested than he was; and so, after coming together to a certain extent—both were fine natures—the presence of grit in the machinery made itself gradually felt, and the friendship melted away. It was a case of each desiring the unalloyed pleasure of an admiring

friendship, without accepting the responsibility of discovering that the other was not perfection, and bearing that discovery loyally and generously. For this is the worst of a friendship that begins in idealisation rather than in comradeship; and this is the danger of all people who idealise. When two such come together and feel a mutual attraction, they display instinctively and unconsciously the best of themselves; but melancholy discoveries supervene; and then what generally happens is that the idealising friend is angry with the other for disappointing his hopes, not with himself for drawing an extravagant picture.

Such friendships have a sort of emotional sensuality about them; and to be dismayed by later discoveries is to decline upon Rousseau's vice of handing in his babies to the Foundling Hospital, instead of trying to bring them up honestly; what lies at the base of it is the indolent shirking of the responsibilities for the natural consequences of friendship. The mistake arises from a kind of selfishness, the selfishness that thinks more of what it wants and desires to get, than of taking what there is soberly and gratefully.

It is often said that it is the duty and privilege of a friend to warn his friend faithfully against his faults. I believe that this is a wholly mistaken principle. The essence of the situation is rather

a cordial partnership, of which the basis is liberty. What I mean by liberty is not a freedom from responsibility, but an absence of obligation. I do not, of course, mean that one is to take all one can get and give as little as one likes, but rather that one must respect one's friend enough—and that is implied in the establishment of the relation—to abstain from directing him, unless he desires and asks for direction. The telling of faults may be safely left to hostile critics, and to what Sheridan calls "d——d good-natured" acquaintances. But the friend must take for granted that his friend desires, in a general way, what is good and true, even though he may pursue it on different lines. One's duty is to encourage and believe in one's friend, not to disapprove of and to censure him. One loves him for what he is, not for what he might be if he would only take one's advice. The point is that it must be all a free gift, not a mutual improvement society—unless indeed that is the basis of the compact. After all, a man can only feel responsible to God. One goes astray, no doubt, like a sheep that is lost; but it is not the duty of another sheep to butt one back into the right way, unless indeed one appeals for help. One may have pastors and directors, but they can never be equal friends. If there is to be superiority in friendship, the lesser must willingly crown the greater; the greater

must not ask to be crowned. The secure friendship is that which begins in comradeship, and moves into a more generous and emotional region. Then there is no need to demand or to question loyalty, because the tie has been welded by many a simple deed, many a frank word. The ideal is a perfect frankness and sincerity, which lays bare the soul as it is, without any false shame or any fear of misunderstanding. A friendship of this kind can be one of the purest, brightest, and strongest things in the world. Yet how rare it is! What far oftener happens is that two people, in a sensitive and emotional mood, are brought together. They begin by comparing experiences, they search their memories for beautiful and suggestive things, and each feels, "This nature is the true complement of my own; what light it seems to shed on my own problems; how subtle, how appreciative it is!" Then the process of discovery begins. Instead of the fair distant city, all spires and towers, which we discerned in the distance in a sort of glory, we find that there are crooked lanes, muddy crossings, dull market-places, tiresome houses. Odd misshapen figures, fretful and wearied, plod through the streets or look out at windows; here is a ruin, with doleful creatures moping in the shade; we overturn a stone, and blind uncanny things writhe away from the light. We begin to reflect that it is after all much like

other places, and that our fine romantic view of it was due to some accident of light and colour, some transfiguring mood of our own mind; and then we set out in search of another city which we see crowning a hill on the horizon, and leave the dull place to its own commonplace life. But to begin with comradeship is to explore the streets and lanes first; and then day by day, as we go up and down in the town, we become aware of its picturesqueness and its charm; we realise that it has an intense and eager life of its own, which we can share as a dweller, though we cannot touch it as a visitor; and so the wonder grows, and the patient love of home. And we have surprises, too: we enter a door in a wall that we have not seen before, and we are in a shrine full of fragrant incense-smoke; the fallen day comes richly through stained windows; figures move at the altar, where some holy rite is being celebrated. The truth is that a friendship cannot be formed in the spirit of a tourist, who is above all in search of the romantic and the picturesque. Sometimes, indeed, the wandering traveller may become the patient and contented inhabitant; but it is generally the other way, and the best friendships are most often those that seem at first sight dully made for us by habit and proximity, and which reveal to us by slow degrees their beauty and their worth.

Thus far had I written, when it came into my mind that I should like to see the reflection of my beliefs in some other mind, to submit them to the test of what I may perhaps be forgiven for calling a spirit-level! And so I read my essay to two wise, kindly, and gracious ladies, who have themselves often indeed graduated in friendship, and taken the highest honours. I will say nothing of the tender courtesy with which they made their head-breaking balms precious; I told them that I had not finished my essay, and that before I launched upon my last antistrophe, I wanted inspiration. I cannot here put down the phrases they used, but I felt that they spoke in symbols, like two initiated persons, for whom the corn and the wine and the oil of the sacrifice stand for very secret and beautiful mysteries; but they said in effect that I had been depicting, and not untruly, the outer courts and corridors of friendship. What they told me of the inner shrine I shall presently describe; but when I asked them to say whether they could tell me instances of the best and highest kind of friendship, existing and increasing and perfecting itself between two men, or between a man and a woman, not lovers or wedded, they found a great difficulty in doing so. We sifted our common experiences of friendships, and we could find but one or two such, and these had

somewhat lost their bloom. It came then to this: that in the emotional region, many women, but very few men, can form the highest kind of tie; and we agreed that men tended to find what they needed in marriage, because they were rather interested in than dependent upon personal emotion, and because practical life, as the years went on—the life of causes, and movements, and organisations, and ideas, and investigations—tended to absorb the energies of men; and that they found their emotional life in home ties; and that the man who lived for emotional relations would tend to be thought, if not to be, a sentimentalist; but that the real secret lay with women, and with men of perhaps a feminine fibre. And all this was transfused by a kind of tender pity, without any touch of complacency or superiority, such as a mother might have for the whispered hopes of a child who is lost in tiny material dreams. But I gathered that there was a region in which the heart could be entirely absorbed in a deep and beautiful admiration for some other soul, and rejoice whole-heartedly in its nobleness and greatness; so that no question of gaining anything, or even of being helped to anything, came in, any more than one who has long been pent in shadow and gloom and illness, and comes out for the first time into the sun, thinks of any benefits that he may receive

from the caressing sunlight; he merely knows that it is joy and happiness and life to be there, and to feel the warm light comfort him and make him glad; and all this I had no difficulty in understanding, for I knew the emotion that they spoke of, though I called it by a different name. I saw that it was love indeed, but love infinitely purified, and with all the sense of possession that mingles with masculine love subtracted from it; and how such a relation might grow and increase, until there arose a sort of secret and vital union of spirit, more real indeed than time and space, so that, even if this were divorced and sundered by absence, or the clouded mind, or death itself, there could be no shadow of doubt as to the permanence of the tie; and a glance passed between the two as they spoke, which made me feel like one who hears an organ rolling, and voices rising in sweet harmonies inside some building, locked and barred, which he may not enter. I could not doubt that the music was there, while I knew that for some dulness or belatedness I was myself shut out; not, indeed, that I doubted of the truth of what was said, but I was in the position of the old saint who said that he believed, and prayed to One to help his unbelief. For I saw that though I projected the lines of my own experience infinitely, adding loyalty to loyalty, and admiration to admiration,

it was all on a different plane. This interfusion of personality, this vital union of soul, I could not doubt it! but it made me feel my own essential isolation still more deeply, as when the streaming sunlight strikes warmth and glow out of the fire, revealing crumbling ashes where a moment before had been a heart of flame.

> "Ah te meae si partem animae rapit
> Maturior vis, quid moror altera?"—

"Ah, if the violence of fate snatch thee from me, thou half of my soul, how can I, the other half, still linger here?" So wrote the old cynical, worldly, Latin poet of his friend—that poet whom, for all his deftness and grace, we are apt to accuse of a certain mundane heartlessness, though once or twice there flickers up a sharp flame from the comfortable warmth of the pile. Had he the secret hidden in his heart all the time? If one could dream of a nearness like that, which doubts nothing, and questions nothing, but which teaches the soul to move in as unconscious a unison with another soul as one's two eyes move, so that the brain cannot distinguish between the impressions of each, would not that be worth the loss of all that we hold most sweet? We pay a price for our qualities; the thistle cannot become the vine, or the oak the rose, by admiration or desire. But we need not doubt of the divine alchemy that

gives good gifts to others, and denies them to ourselves. And thus I can gratefully own that there are indeed these high mysteries of friendship, and I can be glad to discern them afar off, as the dweller on the high moorland, in the wind-swept farm, can see, far away in the woodland valley, the smoke go up from happy cottage-chimneys, nestled in leaves, and the spire point a hopeful finger up to heaven. Life would be a poorer thing if we had all that we desired, and it is permitted to hope that if we are faithful with our few things, we may be made rulers over many things!

IV

HUMOUR

THERE is a pleasant story of a Cambridge undergraduate finding it necessary to expound the four allegorical figures that crown the parapet of Trinity Library. They are the Learned Muses, as a matter of fact. "What are those figures, Jack?" said an ardent sister, labouring under the false feminine impression that men like explaining things. "Those," said Jack, observing them for the first time in his life—"those are Faith, Hope, and Charity, of course." "Oh! but there are *four* of them," said the irrepressible fair one. "What is the other?" Jack, not to be dismayed, gave a hasty glance; and, observing what may be called philosophical instruments in the hands of the statue, said firmly, "that is Geography." It made a charming quaternion.

I have often felt myself that the time has come to raise another figure to the hierarchy of Christian Graces. Faith, Hope, and Charity, were sufficient in a more elementary and barbarous age; but, now that the world has broadened somewhat, I think an addition to the trio is demanded. A

man may be faithful, hopeful, and charitable, and yet leave much to be desired. He may be useful, no doubt, with that equipment, but he may also be both tiresome, and even absurd. The fourth quality that I should like to see raised to the highest rank among Christian graces is the Grace of Humour.

I do not think that Humour has ever enjoyed its due repute in the ethical scale. The possession of it saves a man from priggishness; and the possession of faith, hope, and charity does not. Indeed, not only do these three virtues not save a man from priggishness—they sometimes even plunge him in irreclaimable depths of superiority. I suppose that when Christianity was first making itself felt in the world, the one quality needful was a deep-seated and enthusiastic earnestness. There is nothing that makes life so enjoyable as being in earnest. It is not the light, laughter-loving, jocose people who have the best time in the world. They have a chequered career. They skip at times upon the hills of merriment, but they also descend gloomily at other times into the valleys of dreariness. But the man who is in earnest is generally neither merry nor dreary. He has not time to be either. The early Christians, engaged in leavening the world, had no time for levity or listlessness. A pioneer cannot be humorous. But now that the world is leavened and Christian

principles are theoretically, if not practically, taken for granted, a new range of qualities comes in sight. By humour I do not mean a taste for irresponsible merriment; for though humour is not a necessarily melancholy thing, in this imperfect world the humorist sighs as often as he smiles. What I mean by it is a keen perception of the rich incongruities and absurdities of life, its undue solemnity, its guileless pretentiousness. To be true humour, it must not be at all a cynical thing—as soon as it becomes cynical, it loses all its natural grace; it is an essentially tender-hearted quality, apt to find excuse, ready to condone, eager to forgive. The possessor of it can never be ridiculous, or heavy, or superior. Wit, of course, is a very small province of humour: wit is to humour what lightning is to the electric fluid—a vivid, bright, crackling symptom of it in certain conditions; but a man may be deeply and essentially humorous, and never say a witty thing in his life. To be witty, one has to be fanciful, intellectual, deft, light-hearted; and the humorist need be none of these things.

In religion, the absence of a due sense of humour has been the cause of some of our worst disasters. All rational people know that what has done most to depress and discount religion is ecclesiasticism. The spirit of ecclesiasticism is the spirit that confuses proportions, that loves

what is unimportant, that hides great principles under minute rules, that sacrifices simplicity to complexity, that adores dogma, and definition, and labels of every kind, that substitutes the letter for the spirit. The greatest misfortune that can befall religion is that it should become logical, that it should evolve a reasoned system from insufficient data; but humour abhors logic, and cannot pin its faith on insecure deductions. The heaviest burden which religion can have to bear is the burden of tradition, and humour is the determined foe of everything that is conventional and traditional. The Pharisaical spirit loves precedent and authority; the humorous spirit loves all that is swift and shifting and subversive and fresh. One of the reasons why the orthodox heaven is so depressing a place is that there seems to be no room in it for laughter; it is all harmony and meekness, sanctified by nothing but the gravest of smiles. What wonder that humanity is dejected at the thought of an existence from which all possibility of innocent absurdity and kindly mirth is subtracted—the only things which have persistently lightened and beguiled the earthly pilgrimage! That is why the death of a humorous person has so deep an added tinge of melancholy about it, because it is apt to seem indecorous to think of what was his most congenial and charming trait still finding scope for its exercise. We are

never likely to be able to tolerate the thought of Death, while we continue to think of it as a thing which will rob humanity of some of its richest and most salient characteristics.

Even the ghastly humour of Milton is a shade better than this. It will be remembered that he makes the archangel say to Adam that astronomy has been made by the Creator a complicated subject, in order that the bewilderment of scientific men may be a matter of entertainment to Him!

> "He His fabric of the Heavens
> Hath left to their disputes, perhaps to move
> His laughter at their quaint opinions wide."

Or, again, we may remember the harsh contortions of dry cachinnation indulged in by the rebel spirits, when they have succeeded in toppling over with their artillery the armed host of Seraphim. Milton certainly did not intend to subtract all humour from the celestial regions. The only pity was that he had not himself emerged beyond the childish stage, which finds its deepest amusement in the disasters and catastrophes of stately persons.

It may be asked whether we have any warrant in the Gospel for the Christian exercise of humour. I have no doubt of it myself. The image of the children in the market-place who cannot get their peevish companions to join in

games, whether merry or mournful, as illustrating the attitude of the Pharisees who blamed John the Baptist for asceticism and Christ for sociability, is a touch of real humour; and the story of the importunate widow with the unjust judge, who betrayed so naïvely his principle of judicial action by saying "Though I fear not God, neither regard men, yet will I avenge this widow, lest by her continual coming she weary me," must—I cannot believe otherwise—have been intended to provoke the hearers' mirth. There is not, of course, any superabundance of such instances, but Christ's reporters were not likely to be on the look-out for sayings of this type. Yet I find it impossible to believe that One who touched all the stops of the human heart, and whose stories are among the most beautiful and vivid things ever said in the world, can have exercised His unequalled power over human nature without allowing His hearers to be charmed by many humorous and incisive touches, as well as by more poetical and emotional images. No one has ever swayed the human mind in so unique a fashion, without holding in his hand all the strings that move and stir the faculties of delighted apprehension; and of these faculties humour is one of the foremost. The amazing lightness of Christ's touch upon life, the way in which His words plumbed the depths of personality, make me feel abundantly sure that

there was no dreary sense of overwhelming seriousness in His relations with His friends and disciples. Believing as we do that He was Perfect Man, we surely cannot conceive of one of the sweetest and most enlivening of all human qualities as being foreign to His character.

Otherwise there is little trace of humour in the New Testament. St. Paul, one would think, would have had little sympathy with humorists. He was too fiery, too militant, too much preoccupied with the working out of his ideas, to have the leisure or the inclination to take stock of humanity. Indeed I have sometimes thought that if he had had some touch of the quality, he might have given a different bias to the faith; his application of the method which he had inherited from the Jewish school of theology, coupled with his own fervid rhetoric, was the first step, I have often thought, in disengaging the Christian development from the simplicity and emotion of the first unclouded message, in transferring the faith from the region of pure conduct and sweet tolerance into a province of fierce definition and intellectual interpretation.

I think it was Goethe who said that Greek was the sheath into which the dagger of the human mind fitted best; and it is true that one finds among the Greeks the brightest efflorescence of the human mind. Who shall account for that extra-

ordinary and fragrant flower, the flower of Greek culture, so perfect in curve and colour, in proportion and scent, opening so suddenly, in such a strange isolation, so long ago, upon the human stock? The Greeks had the wonderful combination of childish zest side by side with mature taste; χάρις, as they called it—a perfect charm, an instinctive grace—was the mark of their spirit. And we should naturally expect to find, in their literature, the same sublimation of humour that we find in their other qualities. Unfortunately the greater number of their comedies are lost. Of Menander we have but a few tiny fragments, as it were, of a delectable vase; but in Aristophanes there is a delicious levity, an incomparable prodigality of laughter-moving absurdities, which has possibly never been equalled. Side by side with that is the tender and charming irony of Plato, who is even more humorous, if less witty, than Aristophanes. But the Greeks seem to have been alone in their application of humour to literature. In the older world literature tended to be rather a serious, pensive, stately thing, concerned with human destiny and artistic beauty. One searches in vain for humour in the energetic and ardent Roman mind. Their very comedies were mostly adaptations from the Greek. I have never myself been able to discern the humour of Terence or Plautus to any great extent. The

humour of the latter is of a brutal and harsh kind; and it has always been a marvel to me that Luther said that the two books he would take to be his companions on a desert island would be Plautus and the Bible. Horace and Martial have a certain deft appreciation of human weakness, but it is of the nature of smartness rather than of true humour—the wit of the satirist rather; and then the curtain falls on the older world. When humour next makes its appearance, in France and England pre-eminently, we realise that we are in the presence of a far larger and finer quality; and now we have, so to speak, whole bins full of liquors, of various brands and qualities, from the mirthful absurdities of the English, the pawky gravity of the Scotch, to the dry and sparkling beverage of the American. To give an historical sketch of the growth and development of modern Humour would be a task that might well claim the energies of some literary man; it seems to me surprising that some German philosopher has not attempted a scientific classification of the subject. It would perhaps be best done by a man without appreciation of humour, because only then could one hope to escape being at the mercy of preferences; it would have to be studied purely as a phenomenon, a symptom of the mind; and nothing but an overwhelming love of classification would carry a student past the sense of its unim-

portance. But here I would rather attempt not to find a formula or a definition for humour, but to discover what it is, like argon, by eliminating other characteristics, until the evasive quality alone remains.

It lies deep in nature. The peevish mouth and the fallen eye of the plaice, the helpless rotundity of the sunfish, the mournful gape and rolling glance of the goldfish, the furious and ineffective mien of the barndoor fowl, the wild grotesqueness of the babyroussa and the wart-hog, the crafty solemn eye of the parrot,—if such things as these do not testify to a sense of humour in the Creative Spirit, it is hard to account for the fact that in man a perception is implanted which should find such sights pleasurably entertaining from infancy upwards. I suppose the root of the matter is that, insensibly comparing these facial attributes with the expression of humanity, one credits the animals above described with the emotions which they do not necessarily feel; yet even so it is hard to analyse, because grotesque exaggerations of human features, which are perfectly normal and natural, seem calculated to move the amusement of humanity quite instinctively. A child is apt to be alarmed at first by what is grotesque, and, when once reassured, to find in it a matter of delight. Perhaps the mistake we make is to credit the Creative Spirit with human emotions;

but, on the other hand, it is difficult to see how complex emotions, not connected with any material needs and impulses, can be found existing in organisms, unless the same emotions exist in the mind of their Creator. If the thrush bursts into song on the bare bush at evening, if the child smiles to see the bulging hairy cactus, there must be, I think, something joyful and smiling at the heart, the inmost cell of nature, loving beauty and laughter; indeed, beauty and mirth must be the natural signs of health and content. And then there strike in upon the mind two thoughts. Is, perhaps, the basis of humour a kind of selfish security? Does one primarily laugh at all that is odd, grotesque, broken, ill at ease, fantastic, because such things heighten the sense of one's own health and security? I do not mean that this is the flower of modern humour; but is it not, perhaps, the root? Is not the basis of laughter perhaps the purely childish and selfish impulse to delight, not in the sufferings of others, but in the sense which all distorted things minister to one—that one is temporarily, at least, more blest than they? A child does not laugh for pure happiness—when it is happiest, it is most grave and solemn; but when the sense of its health and soundness is brought home to it poignantly, then it laughs aloud, just as it laughs at the pleasant pain of being tickled, because the tiny

uneasiness throws into relief its sense of secure well-being.

And the further thought—a deep and strange one—is this: We see how all mortal things have a certain curve or cycle of life—youth, maturity, age. May not that law of being run deeper still? We think of nature being ever strong, ever young, ever joyful; but may not the very shadow of sorrow and suffering in the world be the sign that nature too grows old and weary? May there have been a dim age, far back beyond history or fable or scientific record, when she, too, was young and light-hearted? The sorrows of the world are at present not like the sorrows of age, but the sorrows of maturity. There is no decrepitude in the world: its heart is restless, vivid, and hopeful yet; its melancholy is as the melancholy of youth—a melancholy deeply tinged with beauty; it is full of boundless visions and eager dreams; though it is thwarted, it believes in its ultimate triumph; and the growth of humour in the world may be just the shadow of hard fact falling upon the generous vision, for that is where humour resides; youth believes glowingly that all things are possible, but maturity sees that to hope is not to execute, and acquiesces smilingly in the incongruity between the programme and the performance.

Humour resides in the perception of limitation,

in discerning how often the conventional principle is belied by the actual practice. The old world was full of a youthful sense of its own importance; it held that all things were created for man—that the flower was designed to yield him colour and fragrance, that the beast of the earth was made to give him food and sport. This philosophy was summed up in the phrase that *man was the measure of all things;* but now we have learnt that man is but the most elaborate of created organisms, and that just as there was a time when man did not exist, so there may be a time to come when beings infinitely more elaborate may look back to man as we look back to trilobites—those strange creatures, like huge wood-lice, that were in their day the glory and crown of creation. Perhaps our dreams of supremacy and finality may be in reality the absurdest things in the world for their pomposity and pretentiousness. Who can say?

But to retrace our steps awhile. It seems that the essence of humour is a certain perception of incongruity. Let us take a single instance. There is a story of a drunken man who was observed to feel his way several times all round the railings of a London square, with the intention apparently of finding some way of getting in. At last he sat down, covered his face with his hands, and burst into tears, saying, with deep pathos, "I am shut

in!" In a sense it was true: if the rest of the world was his prison, and the garden of the square represented liberty, he was undoubtedly incarcerated. Or, again, take the story of the Scotchman returning from a convivial occasion, who had jumped carefully over the shadows of the lamp-posts, but on coming to the shadow of the church-tower, ruefully took off his boots and stockings, and turned his trousers up, saying, "I'll ha'e to wade." The reason why the stories of drunken persons are often so indescribably humorous, though, no doubt, highly deplorable in a Christian country, is that the victim loses all sense of probability and proportion, and laments unduly over an altogether imaginary difficulty. The appreciation of such situations is in reality the same as the common and barbarous form of humour, of which we have already spoken, which consists in being amused at the disasters which befall others. The stage that is but slightly removed from the lowest stage is the theory of practical jokes, the humour of which is the pleasure of observing the actions of a person in a disagreeable predicament which is not so serious as the victim supposes. And thus we get to the region illustrated by the two stories I have told, where the humour lies in the observation of one in a predicament that appears to be of a tragic character, when the tragic element is

purely imaginary. And so we pass into the region of intellectual humour, which may be roughly illustrated by such sayings as that of George Sand that nothing is such a restorative as rhetoric, or the claim advanced by a patriot that Shakespeare was undoubtedly a Scotchman, on the ground that his talents would justify the supposition. The humour of George Sand's epigram depends upon the perception that rhetoric, which ought to be based upon a profound conviction, an overwhelming passion, an intense enthusiasm, is often little more than the abandonment of a personality to a mood of intoxicating ebullience; while the humour of the Shakespeare story lies in a sense of the way in which a national predilection will override all reasonable evidence.

It will be recognised how much of our humour depends upon our keen perception of the weaknesses and imperfections of other nationalities. A great statesman once said that if a Scotchman applied for a post and was unsuccessful, his one object became to secure the post for another Scotchman; while if an Irishman made an unsuccessful application, his only aim was to prevent any other Irishman from obtaining the post. That is a humorous way of contrasting the jealous patriotism of the Scot with the passionate individualism of the Celt. The curious factor of this species of humour is that we are entirely

unable to recognise the typicality of the caricatures which other nations draw of ourselves. A German fails to recognise the English idea of the German as a man who, after a meal of gigantic proportions and incredible potations, among the smoke of endless cigars, will discuss the terminology of the absolute, and burst into tears over a verse of poetry or a strain of music. Similarly the Englishman cannot divine what is meant by the Englishman of the French stage, with his long whiskers, his stiff pepper-and-salt clothes, walking arm-in-arm with a raw-boned wife, short-skirted and long-toothed, with a bevy of short-skirted and long-toothed daughters walking behind.

But if it requires a robust humorist to perceive the absurdity of his own nation, what intensity of humour is required for a man to see the absurdity of himself! To acquiesce in appearing ridiculous is the height of philosophy. We are glad enough to amuse other people intentionally, but how many men does one know who do not resent amusing other people unintentionally? Yet if one were a true philanthropist, how delighted we ought to be to afford to others a constant feast of innocent and joyful contemplation.

But the fact which emerges from all these considerations is the fact that we do not give humour its place of due dignity in the moral and emotional

scale. The truth is that we in England have fallen into a certain groove of humour of late, the humour of paradox. The formula which lies at the base of our present output of humour is the formula, "Whatever is, is wrong." The method has been over-organised, and the result is that humour can be manufactured in unlimited quantities. The type of such humour is the saying of the humorist that he went about the world with one dread constantly hanging over him—"the dread of not being misunderstood." I would not for a moment deny the quality of such humour, but it grows vapid and monotonous. It is painful to observe the clever young man of the present day, instead of aiming at the expression of things beautiful and emotional, which he is often well equipped to produce, with all the charm of freshness and indiscretion, turn aside to smart writing of a cynical type, because he cannot bear to be thought immature. He wants to see the effect of his cleverness, and the envious smile of the slower-witted is dearer to him than the secret kindling of a sympathetic mind. Real humour is a broader and a deeper thing, and it can hardly be attained until a man has had some acquaintance with the larger world; and that very experience, in natures that are emotional rather than patient, often tends to extinguish humour, because of the knowledge that life is really rather too sad and serious a business

to afford amusement. The man who becomes a humorist is the man who contrives to retain a certain childlike zest and freshness of mind side by side with a large and tender tolerance. This state of mind is not one to be diligently sought after. The humorist *nascitur non fit.* One sees young men of irresponsible levity drawn into the interest of a cause or a profession, and we say sadly of them that they have lost their sense of humour. They are probably both happier and more useful for having lost it. The humorist is seldom an apostle or a leader. But one does occasionally find a man of real genius who adds to a deep and vital seriousness a delightful perception of the superficial absurdities of life; who is like a river, at once strong and silent beneath, with sunny ripples and bright water-breaks upon the surface. Most men must be content to flow turbid and sullen, turning the mills of life or bearing its barges; others may dash and flicker through existence, like a shallow stream. Perhaps, indeed, it may be said that to be a real humorist there must be a touch of hardness somewhere, a bony carapace, because we seldom see one of very strong and ardent emotions who is a true humorist; and this is, I suppose, the reason why women, as a rule, are so far less humorous than men. We have to pay a price for our good qualities; and though I had rather be strong, affectionate, loyal,

noble-minded, than be the best humorist in the world, yet if a gift of humour be added to these graces, you have a combination that is absolutely irresistible, because you have a perfect sense of proportion that never allows emotion to degenerate into gush, or virtue into rigidity; and thus I say that humour is a kind of divine and crowning grace in a character, because it means an artistic sense of proportion, a true and vital tolerance, a power of infinite forgiveness.

V

TRAVEL

THERE are many motives that impel us to travel, to change our sky, as Horace calls it—good motives and bad, selfish and unselfish, noble and ignoble. With some people it is pure restlessness; the tedium of ordinary life weighs on them, and travel, they think, will distract them; people travel for the sake of health, or for business reasons, or to accompany some one else, or because other people travel. And these motives are neither good nor bad, they are simply sufficient. Some people travel to enlarge their minds, or to write a book; and the worst of travelling for such reasons is that it so often implants in the traveller, when he returns, a desperate desire to enlarge other people's minds too. Unhappily, it needs an extraordinary gift of vivid description and a tactful art of selection to make the reflections of one's travels interesting to other people. It is a great misfortune for biographers that there are abundance of people who are stirred, partly by unwonted leisure and partly by awakened interest, to keep a diary only when they are

abroad. These extracts from diaries of foreign travel, which generally pour their muddy stream into a biography on the threshold of the hero's manhood, are things to be resolutely skipped. What one desires in a biography is to see the ordinary texture of a man's life, an account of his working days, his normal hours; and to most people the normal current of their lives appears so commonplace and uninteresting that they keep no record of it; while they often keep an elaborate record of their impressions of foreign travel, which are generally superficial and picturesque, and remarkably like the impressions of all other intelligent people. A friend of mine returned the other day from an American tour, and told me that he received a severe rebuke, out of the mouth of a babe, which cured him of expatiating on his experiences. He lunched with his brother soon after his return, and was holding forth with a consciousness of brilliant descriptive emphasis, when his eldest nephew, aged eight, towards the end of the meal, laid down his spoon and fork, and said piteously to his mother, "Mummy, I *must* talk; it does make me so tired to hear Uncle going on like that." A still more effective rebuke was administered by a clever lady of my acquaintance to a cousin of hers, a young lady who had just returned from India, and was very full of her experiences. The cousin had devoted herself during

breakfast to giving a lively description of social life in India, and was preparing to spend the morning in continuing her lecture, when the elder lady slipped out of the room, and returned with some sermon-paper, a blotting-book, and a pen. "Maud," she said, "this is too good to be lost: you must write it all down, every word!" The projected manuscript did not come to very much, but the lesson was not thrown away.

Perhaps, for most people, the best results of travel are that they return with a sense of grateful security to the familiar scene: the monotonous current of life has been enlivened, the old relationships have gained a new value, the old gossip is taken up with a comfortable zest; the old rooms are the best, after all; the homely language is better than the outlandish tongue; it is a comfort to have done with squeezing the sponge and cramming the trunk: it is good to be at home.

But to people of more cultivated and intellectual tastes there is an abundance of good reasons for the pursuit of impressions. It is worth a little fatigue to see the spring sun lie softly upon the unfamiliar foliage, to see the delicate tints of the purple-flowered Judas-tree, the bright colours of Southern houses, the old high-shouldered château blinking among its wooded parterres; it is pleasant to see mysterious rites conducted at tabernacled altars, under dark arches, and to smell the "thick,

strong, stupefying incense-smoke"; to see well-known pictures in their native setting, to hear the warm waves of the canal lapping on palace-stairs, with the exquisite moulded cornice overhead. It gives one a strange thrill to stand in places rich with dim associations, to stand by the tombs of heroes and saints, to see the scenes made familiar by art or history, the homes of famous men. Such travel is full of weariness and disappointment. The place one had desired half a lifetime to behold turns out to be much like other places, devoid of inspiration. A tiresome companion casts dreariness as from an inky cloud upon the mind. Do I not remember visiting the Palatine with a friend bursting with archæological information, who led us from room to room, and identified all by means of a folding plan, to find at the conclusion that he had begun at the wrong end, and that even the central room was not identified correctly, because the number of rooms was even, and not odd?

But, for all that, there come blessed unutterable moments, when the mood and the scene and the companion are all attuned in a soft harmony. Such moments come back to me as I write. I see the mouldering brickwork of a crumbling tomb all overgrown with grasses and snapdragons, far out in the Campagna; or feel the plunge of the boat through the reed-beds of the Anapo, as we slid into the silent pool of

blue water in the heart of the marsh, where the sand danced at the bottom, and the springs bubbled up, while a great bittern flew booming away from a reedy pool hard by. Such things are worth paying a heavy price for, because they bring a sort of aërial distance into the mind, they touch the spirit with a hope that the desire for beauty and perfection is not, after all, wholly unrealisable, but that there is a sort of treasure to be found even upon earth, if one diligently goes in search of it.

Of one thing, however, I am quite certain, and that is that travel should not be a feverish garnering of impressions, but a delicious and leisurely plunge into a different atmosphere. It is better to visit few places, and to become at home in each, than to race from place to place, guide-book in hand. A beautiful scene does not yield up its secrets to the eye of the collector. What one wants is not definite impressions but indefinite influences. It is of little use to enter a church, unless one tries to worship there, because the essence of the place is worship, and only through worship can the secret of the shrine be apprehended. It is of little use to survey a landscape, unless one has an overpowering desire to spend the remainder of one's days there; because it is the life of the place, and not the sight of it, in which one desires to have a part.

Above all, one must not let one's memories sleep as in a dusty lumber-room of the mind. In a quiet firelit hour one must draw near, and scrutinise them afresh, and ask oneself what remains. As I write, I open the door of my treasury and look round. What comes up before me? I see an opalescent sky, and the great soft blue rollers of a sapphire sea. I am journeying, it seems, in no mortal boat, though it was a commonplace vessel enough at the time, twenty years ago, and singularly destitute of bodily provision. What is that over the sea's rim, where the tremulous, shifting, blue line of billows shimmers and fluctuates? A long, low promontory, and in the centre, over white clustered houses and masts of shipping, rises a white dome like the shrine of some celestial city. That is Cadiz for me. I dare say the picture is all wrong, and I shall be told that Cadiz has a tower and is full of factory chimneys; but for me the dome, ghostly white, rises as though moulded out of a single pearl, upon the shifting edges of the haze. Whatever I have seen in my life, that at least is immortal.

Or again the scene shifts, and now I stumble to the deck of another little steamer, very insufficiently habited, in the sharp freshness of the dawn of a spring morning. The waves are different here—not the great steely league-long

rollers of the Atlantic, but the sharp azure waves, marching in rhythmic order, of the Mediterranean; what is the land, with grassy downs and folded valleys falling to grey cliffs, upon which the brisk waves whiten and leap? That is Sicily; and the thought of Theocritus, with the shepherd-boy singing light-heartedly upon the headland a song of sweet days and little eager joys, comes into my heart like wine, and brings a sharp touch of tears into the eyes. Theocritus! How little I thought, as I read the ugly brown volume with its yellow paper, in the dusty schoolroom at Eton ten years before, that it was going to mean that to me, sweetly as even then, in a moment torn from the noisy tide of schoolboy life, came the pretty echoes of the song into a little fanciful and restless mind! But now, as I saw those deserted limestone crags, that endless sheep-wold, with no sign of a habitation, rising and falling far into the distance, with the fresh sea-breeze upon my cheek—there came upon me that tender sorrow for all the beautiful days that are dead, the days when the shepherds walked together, exulting in youth and warmth and good-fellowship and song, to the village festival, and met the wandering minstrel, with his coat of skin and his kind, ironical smile, who gave them, after their halting lays, a touch of the old true melody from a master's hand. What

do all those old and sweet dreams mean for me, the sunlight that breaks on the stream of human souls, flowing all together, alike through dark rocks where the water chafes and thunders, and spreading out into tranquil shining reaches, where the herons stand half asleep? What does that strange drift of kindred spirits, moving from the unknown to the unknown, mean for me? I only know that it brings into my mind a strange yearning, and a desire of almost unearthly sweetness for all that is delicate and beautiful and full of charm, together with a sombre pity for the falling mist of tears, the hard discipline of the world, the cries of anguish, as life lapses from the steep into the silent tide of death.

Or, again, I seem once more to sit in the balcony of a house that looks out towards Vesuvius. It is late; the sky is clouded, the air is still; a grateful coolness comes up from acre after acre of gardens climbing the steep slope; a fluttering breeze, that seems to have lost his way in the dusk, comes timidly and whimsically past, like Ariel, singing as soft as a far-off falling sea in the great pine overhead, making a little sudden flutter in the dry leaves of the thick creeper; like Ariel comes that dainty spirit of the air, laden with balmy scents and cool dew. A few lights twinkle in the plain below. Opposite, the sky has an added blackness, an impenetrability of shade; but

what is the strange red eye of light that hangs between earth and heaven? And, stranger still, what is that phantasmal gleam of a lip of crags high in the air, and that mysterious, moving, shifting light, like a pale flame, above it? The gloomy spot is a rent in the side of Vesuvius where the smouldering heat has burnt through the crust, and where a day or two before I saw a viscid stream of molten liquor, with the flames playing over it, creeping, creeping through the tunnelled ashes; and in the light above is the lip of Vesuvius itself, with it restless furnace at work, casting up a billowy swell of white oily smoke, while the glare of the fiery pit lights up the underside of the rising vapours. A ghastly manifestation, that, of sleepless and stern forces, ever at work upon some eternal and bewildering task; and yet so strangely made am I, that these fierce signal-fires, seen afar, but blend with the scents of the musky alleys for me into a thrill of unutterable wonder.

There are hundreds of such pictures stored in my mind, each stamped upon some sensitive particle of the brain, that cannot be obliterated, and each of which the mind can recall at will. And that, too, is a fact of surpassing wonder: what is the delicate instrument that registers, with no seeming volition, these amazing pictures, and preserves them thus with so fantastic a care,

retouching them, fashioning them anew, detaching from the picture every sordid detail, till each is as a lyric, inexpressible, exquisite, too fine for words to touch?

Now it is useless to dictate to others the aims and methods of travel: each must follow his own taste. To myself the acquisition of knowledge and information is in these matters an entirely negligible thing. To me the one and supreme object is the gathering of a gallery of pictures; and yet that is not a definite object either, for the whimsical and stubborn spirit refuses to be bound by any regulations in the matter. It will garner up with the most poignant care a single vignette, a tiny detail. I see, as I write, the vision of a great golden-grey carp swimming lazily in the clear pool of Arethusa, the carpet of mesembryanthemum that, for some fancy of its own, chose to involve the whole of a railway viaduct with its flaunting magenta flowers and its fleshy leaves. I see the edge of the sea, near Syracuse, rimmed with a line of the intensest yellow, and I hear the voice of a guide explaining that it was caused by the breaking up of a stranded orange-boat, so that the waves for many hundred yards threw up on the beach a wrack of fruit; yet the same wilful and perverse mind will stand impenetrably dumb and blind before the noblest and sweetest prospect, and decline to receive any

impression at all. What is perhaps the oddest characteristic of the tricksy spirit is that it often chooses moments of intense discomfort and fatigue to master some scene, and take its indelible picture. I suppose that the reason of this is that the mind makes, at such moments, a vigorous effort to protest against the tyranny of the vile body, and to distract itself from instant cares,

But another man may travel for archæological or even statistical reasons. He may wish, like Ulysses, to study "manners, councils, customs, governments." He may be preoccupied with questions of architectural style or periods of sculpture. I have a friend who takes up at intervals the study of the pictures of a particular master, and will take endless trouble and undergo incredible discomfort, in order to see the vilest daubs, if only he can make his list complete, and say that he has seen all the reputed works of the master. This instinct is, I believe, nothing but the survival of the childish instinct for collecting, and though I can reluctantly admire any man who spares no trouble to gain an end, the motive is dark and unintelligible to me.

There are some travellers, like Dean Stanley, who drift from the appreciation of natural scenery into the pursuit of historical associations. The story of Stanley as a boy, when he had his first sight of the snowy Alps on the horizon, always

delights me. He danced about saying, "Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do?" But, in later days, Stanley would not go a mile to see a view, while he would travel all night to see a few stones of a ruin, jutting out of a farmyard wall, if only there was some human and historical tradition connected with the place. I do not myself understand that. I should not wish to see Etna merely because Empedocles is supposed to have jumped down the crater, nor the site of Jericho because the walls fell down at the trumpets of the host. The only interest to me in an historical scene is that it should be in such a condition as that one can to a certain extent reconstruct the original drama, and be sure that one's eyes rest upon very much the same scene as the actors saw. The reason why Syracuse moved me by its acquired beauty, and not for its historical associations, was because I felt convinced that Thucydides, who gives so picturesque a description of the sea-fight, can never have set eyes on the place, and must have embroidered his account from scanty hearsay. But, on the other hand, there are few things in the world more profoundly moving than to see a place where great thoughts have been conceived and great books written, when one is able to feel that the scene is hardly changed. The other day, as I passed before the sacred gate of Rydal Mount, I took my hat off my head with a sense of in-

describable reverence. My companion asked me laughingly why I did so. "Why?" I said. "From natural piety, of course! I know every detail here as well as if I had lived here, and I have walked in thought a hundred times with the poet, to and fro in the laurelled walks of the garden, up the green shoulder of Nab Scar, and sat in the little parlour, while the fire leapt on the hearth, and heard him 'booing' his verses, to be copied by some friendly hand."

I thrill to see the stately rooms of Abbotsford, with all their sham feudal decorations, the little staircase by which Scott stole away to his solitary work, the folded clothes, the shapeless hat, the ugly shoes, laid away in the glass case; the plantations where he walked with his shrewd bailiff, the place where he stopped so often on the shoulder of the slope, to look at the Eildon Hills, the rooms where he sat, a broken and bereaved man, yet with so gallant a spirit, to wrestle with sorrow and adversity. I wept, I am not ashamed to say, at Abbotsford, at the sight of the stately Tweed rolling his silvery flood past lawns and shrubberies, to think of that kindly, brave, and honourable heart, and his passionate love of all the goodly and cheerful joys of life and earth.

Or, again, it was a solemn day for me to pass from the humble tenement where Coleridge lived, at Nether Stowey, before the cloud of sad habit

had darkened his horizon, and turned him away from the wells of poetry into the deserts of metaphysical speculation, to find, if he could, some medicine for his tortured spirit. I walked with a holy awe along the leafy lanes to Alfoxden, where the beautiful house nestles in the green combe among its oaks, thinking how here, and here, Wordsworth and Coleridge had walked together in the glad days of youth, and planned, in obscurity and secluded joy, the fresh and lovely lyrics of their matin-prime.

I turn, I confess, more eagerly to scenes like these than to scenes of historical and political tradition, because there hangs for me a glory about the scene of the conception and genesis of beautiful imaginative work that is unlike any glory that the earth holds. The natural joy of the youthful spirit receiving the impact of mighty thoughts, of poignant impressions, has for me a liberty and a grace which no historical or political associations could ever possess. I could not glow to see the room in which a statesman worked out the details of a Bill for the extension of the franchise, or a modification of the duties upon imports and exports, though I respect the growing powers of democracy and the extinction of privilege and monopoly; but these measures are dimmed and tainted with intrigue and manœuvre and statecraft. I do not deny their importance, their

worth, their nobleness. But not by committees and legislation does humanity triumph. In the vanguard go the blessed adventurous spirits that quicken the moral temperature, and uplift the banner of simplicity and sincerity. The host marches heavily behind, and the commissariat rolls grumbling in the rear of all; and though my place may be with the work-a-day herd, I will send my fancy afar among the leafy valleys and the far-off hills of hope.

But I would not here quarrel with the taste of any man. If a mortal chooses to travel in search of comfortable rooms, new cookery and wines, the livelier gossip of unknown people, in heaven's name let him do so. If another wishes to study economic conditions, standards of life, rates of wages, he has my gracious leave for his pilgrimage. If another desires to amass historical and archæological facts, measurements of hypæthral temples, modes of burial, folk-lore, fortification, God forbid that I should throw cold water on the quest. But the only traveller whom I recognise as a kindred spirit is the man who goes in search of impressions and effects, of tone and atmosphere, of rare and curious beauty, of uplifting association. Nothing that has ever moved the interest, or the anxiety, or the care, or the wonder, of human beings can ever wholly lose its charm. I have felt my skin prickle and creep at the sight of that amazing

thing in the Dublin museum, a section dug bodily out of a claypit, and showing the rough-hewn stones of a cist, deep in the earth, the gravel over it and around it, the roots of the withered grass forming a crust many feet above, and, inside the cist, the rude urn, reversed over a heap of charred ashes; it was not the curiosity of the sight that moved me, but the thought of the old dark life revealed, the dim and savage world, that was yet shot through and pierced, even as now, with sorrow for death, and care for the beloved ashes of a friend and chieftain. Such a sight sets a viewless network of emotion, which seems to interlace far back into the ages, all pulsating and stirring. One sees in a flash that humanity lived, carelessly and brutally perhaps, as we too live, and were confronted, as we are confronted, with the horror of the gap, the intolerable mystery of life lapsing into the dark. Ah, the relentless record, the impenetrable mystery! I care very little, I fear, for the historical development of funereal rites, and hardly more for the light that such things throw on the evolution of society. I leave that gratefully enough to the philosophers. What I care for is the touch of nature that shows me my ancient brethren of the dim past—who would have mocked and ridiculed me, I doubt not, if I had fallen into their hands, and killed me as carelessly as one throws aside the rind of a squeezed fruit—yet I am one of them, and per-

haps even something of their blood flows in my veins yet.

As I grow older, I tend to travel less and less, and I do not care if I never cross the Channel again. Is there a right and a wrong in the matter, an advisability or an inadvisability, an expediency or an inexpediency? I do not think so. Travelling is a pleasure, if it is anything, and a pleasure pursued from a sense of duty is a very fatuous thing. I have no good reason to give, only an accumulation of small reasons. Dr. Johnson once said that any number of insufficient reasons did not make a sufficient one, just as a number of rabbits did not make a horse. A lively but misleading illustration: he might as well have said that any number of sovereigns did not make a cheque for a hundred pounds. I suppose that I do not like the trouble, to start with; and then I do not like being adrift from my own beloved country. Then I cannot converse in any foreign language, and half the pleasure of travelling comes from being able to lay oneself alongside of a new point of view. Then, too, I realise, as I grow older, how little I have really seen of my own incomparably beautiful and delightful land, so that, like the hero of Newman's hymn,

> "I do not ask to see
> The distant scene; one step enough for me."

And, lastly, I have a reason which will perhaps seem a far-fetched one. Travel is essentially a

distraction, and I do not want to be distracted any more. One of the mistakes that people make, in these Western latitudes, is to be possessed by an inordinate desire to drown thought. The aim of many men whom I know seems to me to be occupied in some absolutely definite way, so that they may be as far as possible unaware of their own existence. Anything to avoid reflection! A normal Englishman does not care very much what the work and value of his occupation is, as long as he is occupied; and I am not at all sure that we came into the world to be occupied. Christ, in the Gospel story, rebuked the busy Martha for her bustling anxieties, her elaborate attentions to her guests, and praised the leisurely Mary for desiring to sit and hear Him talk. Socrates spent his life in conversation. I do not say that contemplation is a duty, but I cannot help thinking that we are not forbidden to scrutinise life, to wonder what it is all about, to study its problems, to apprehend its beauty and significance. We admire a man who goes on making money long after he has made far more than he needs; we think a life honourably spent in editing Greek books. Socrates in one of Plato's dialogues quotes the opinion of a philosopher to the effect that when a man has made enough to live upon, he should begin to practise virtue. "I think he should begin even earlier," says the interlocutor; and I am wholly in agreement with him. Travel is one of the expedients

to which busy men resort, in order that they may forget their existence. I do not venture to think this exactly culpable, but I feel sure that it is a pity that people do not do less and think more. If a man asks what good comes from thinking, I can only retort by asking what good comes from the multiplication of unnecessary activity. I am quite as much at a loss as any one else to say what is the object of life, but I do not feel any doubt that we are not sent into the world to be in a fuss. Like the lobster in *The Water-Babies*, I cry, "Let me alone; I want to think!" because I believe that that occupation is at least as profitable as many others.

And then, too, without travelling more than a few miles from my door, I can see things fully as enchanting as I can see by ranging Europe. I went to-day along a well-known road; just where the descent begins to fall into a quiet valley, there stands a windmill—not one of the ugly black circular towers that one sometimes sees, but one of the old crazy boarded sort, standing on a kind of stalk; out of the little loopholes of the mill the flour had dusted itself prettily over the weather-boarding. From a mysterious hatch half-way up leaned the miller, drawing up a sack of grain with a little pulley. There is nothing so enchanting as to see a man leaning out of a dark doorway high up in the air. He drew the sack in, he closed the panel. The sails whirled, flapping and creaking;

and I loved to think of him in the dusty gloom, with the gear grumbling among the rafters, tipping the golden grain into its funnel, while the rattling hopper below poured out its soft stream of flour. Beyond the mill, the ground sank to a valley; the roofs clustered round a great church tower, the belfry windows blinking solemnly. Hard by the ancient Hall peeped out from its avenue of elms. That was a picture as sweet as anything I have ever seen abroad, as perfect a piece of art as could be framed, and more perfect than anything that could be painted, because it was a piece out of the old kindly, quiet life of the world. One ought to learn, as the years flow on, to love such scenes as that, and not to need to have the blood and the brain stirred by romantic prospects, peaked hills, well-furnished galleries, magnificent buildings: *mutare animum*, that is the secret, to grow more hopeful, more alive to delicate beauties, more tender, less exacting. Nothing, it is true, can give us peace; but we get nearer it by loving the familiar scene, the old homestead, the tiny valley, the wayside copse, than we do by racing over Europe on the track of Giorgione, or over Asia in pursuit of local colour. After all, everything has its appointed time. It is good to range in youth, to rub elbows with humanity, and then, as the days go on, to take stock, to remember, to wonder, "To be content with little, to serve beauty well."

VI

SPECIALISM

IT is a very curious thing to reflect how often an old platitude or axiom retains its vitality, long after the conditions which gave it birth have altered, and it no longer represents a truth. It would not matter if such platitudes only lived on dustily in vapid and ill-furnished minds, like the vases of milky-green opaque glass decorated with golden stars, that were the joy of Early Victorian chimney-pieces, and now hold spills in the second-best spare bedroom. But like the psalmist's enemies, platitudes live and are mighty. They remain, and, alas! they have the force of arguments in the minds of sturdy unreflective men, who describe themselves as plain, straightforward people, and whose opinions carry weight in a community whose feelings are swayed by the statements of successful men rather than by the conclusions of reasonable men.

One of these pernicious platitudes is the statement that every one ought to know something about everything and everything about something.

It has a speciously epigrammatic air about it, dazzling enough to persuade the common-sense person that it is an intellectual judgment.

As a matter of fact, under present conditions, it represents an impossible and even undesirable ideal. A man who tried to know something about everything would end in knowing very little about anything; and the most exhaustive programme that could be laid down for the most erudite of *savants* nowadays would be that he should know anything about anything, while the most resolute of specialists must be content with knowing something about something.

A well-informed friend told me, the other day, the name and date of a man who, he said, could be described as the last person who knew practically everything at his date that was worth knowing. I have forgotten both the name and the date and the friend who told me, but I believe that the learned man in question was a cardinal in the sixteenth century. At the present time, the problem of the accumulation of knowledge and the multiplication of books is a very serious one indeed. It is, however, morbid to allow it to trouble the mind. Like all insoluble problems, it will settle itself in a way so obvious that the people who solve it will wonder that any one could ever have doubted what the solution would be, just as the problem of the depletion of the

world's stock of coal will no doubt be solved in some perfectly simple fashion.

The dictum in question is generally quoted as an educational formula in favour of giving every one what is called a sound general education. And it is probably one of the contributory causes which account for the present chaos of curricula. All subjects are held to be so important, and each subject is thought by its professors to be so peculiarly adapted for educational stimulus, that a resolute selection of subjects, which is the only remedy, is not attempted; and accordingly the victim of educational theories is in the predicament of the man described by Dr. Johnson who could not make up his mind which leg of his breeches he would put his foot into first. Meanwhile, said the Doctor, with a directness of speech which requires to be palliated, the process of investiture is suspended.

But the practical result of the dilemma is the rise of specialism. The *savant* is dead and the specialist rules. It is interesting to try to trace the effect of this revolution upon our national culture.

Now, I have no desire whatever to take up the cudgels against the specialists: they are a harmless and necessary race, so long as they are aware of their limitations. But the tyranny of an oligarchy is the worst kind of tyranny,

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because it means the triumph of an average over individuals, whereas the worst that can be said of a despotism is that it is the triumph of an individual over an average. The tyranny of the specialistic oligarchy is making itself felt to-day, and I should like to fortify the revolutionary spirit of liberty, whose boast it is to detest tyranny in all its forms, whether it is the tyranny of an enlightened despot, or the tyranny of a virtuous oligarchy, or the tyranny of an intelligent democracy.

The first evil which results from the rule of the specialist is the destruction of the *amateur*. So real a fact is the tyranny of the specialist that the very word "amateur," which means a leisurely lover of fine things, is beginning to be distorted into meaning an inefficient performer. As an instance of its correct and idiomatic use, I often think of the delightful landlord whom Stevenson encountered somewhere, and upon whom he pressed some Burgundy which he had with him. The generous host courteously refused a second glass, saying, "You see I am an amateur of these things, and I am capable of leaving you not sufficient." Now, I shall concern myself here principally with literature, because, in England at all events, literature plays the largest part in general culture. It may be said that we owe some of the best literature we

have to amateurs. To contrast a few names, taken at random, Shakespeare, Dryden, Pope, Dr. Johnson, De Quincey, Tennyson, and Carlyle were professionals, it is true; but, on the other hand, Milton, Gray, Boswell, Walter Scott, Charles Lamb, Shelley, Browning, and Ruskin were amateurs. It is not a question of how much a man writes or publishes, it is a question of the spirit in which a man writes. Walter Scott became a professional in the last years of his life, and for the noblest of reasons; but he also became a bad writer. A good pair to contrast are Southey and Coleridge. They began as amateurs. Southey became a professional writer, and his sun set in the mists of valuable information. Coleridge, as an amateur, enriched the language with a few priceless poems, and then got involved in the morass of dialectical metaphysics. The point is whether a man writes simply because he cannot help it, or whether he writes to make an income. The latter motive does not by any means prevent his doing first-rate artistic work—indeed, there are certain persons who seem to have required the stimulus of necessity to make them break through an initial indolence of nature. When Johnson found fault with Gray for having times of the year when he wrote more easily, from the vernal to the autumnal equinox, he added that a man could write at any time if he set

himself doggedly to it. True, no doubt! But to write doggedly is not to court favourable conditions for artistic work. It may be a finer sight for a moralist to see a man performing an appointed task heavily and faithfully, with grim tenacity, than it is to see an artist in a frenzy of delight dashing down an overpowering impression of beauty; but what has always hampered the British appreciation of literature is that we cannot disentangle the moral element from it: we are interested in morals, not in art, and we require a dash of optimistic piety in all writing that we propose to enjoy.

The real question is whether, if a man sets himself doggedly to work, the appetite comes with eating, and whether the caged bird begins to flutter its wings and to send out the song that it learnt in the green heart of the wood. When Byron said that easy writing made d——d hard reading, he meant that careless conception and hasty workmanship tend to blur the pattern and the colour of work. The fault of the amateur is that he can make the coat, but he cannot be bothered to make it fit. But it is not by any means true that hard writing makes easy reading. The spirit of the amateur is the spirit of the lover, who trembles at the thought that the delicate creature he loves may learn to love him in return, if he can but praise her worthily. The profes-

sional spirit is the spirit in which a man carefully and courteously woos an elderly spinster for the sake of her comfortable fortune. The amateur has an irresponsible joy in his work; he is like the golfer who dreams of mighty drives, and practises "putting" on his back lawn: the professional writer gives his solid hours to his work in a conscientious spirit, and is glad in hours of freedom to put the tiresome business away. Yet neither the amateur nor the professional can hope to capture the spirit of art by joy or faithfulness. It is a kind of divine felicity, when all is said and done, the kindly gift of God.

Now into this free wild world of art and literature and music comes the specialist and pegs out his claim, fencing out the amateur, who is essentially a rambler, from a hundred eligible situations. In literature this is particularly the case: the amateur is told by the historian that he must not intrude upon history; that history is a science, and not a province of literature; that the time has not come to draw any conclusions or to summarise any tendencies; that picturesque narrative is an offence against the spirit of Truth; that no one is as black or as white as he is painted; and that to trifle with history is to commit a sin compounded of the sin of Ananias and Simon Magus. The amateur runs off, his hands over his ears, and henceforth hardly dares

even to read history, to say nothing of writing it. Perhaps I draw too harsh a picture, but the truth is that I did, as a very young man, with no training except that provided by a sketchy knowledge of the classics, once attempt to write an historical biography. I shudder to think of my method and equipment; I skipped the dull parts, I left all tiresome documents unread. It was a sad farrago of enthusiasm and levity and heady writing. But Jove's thunder rolled and the bolt fell. A just man, whom I have never quite forgiven, to tell the truth, told me with unnecessary rigour and acrimony that I had made a pitiable exhibition of myself. But I have thanked God ever since, for I turned to literature pure and simple.

Then, too, it is the same with art-criticism; here the amateur again, who, poor fool, is on the look-out for what is beautiful, is told that he must not meddle with art unless he does it seriously, which means that he must devote himself mainly to the study of inferior masterpieces, and schools, and tendencies. In literature it is the same; he must not devote himself to reading and loving great books, he must disentangle influences; he must discern the historical importance of writers, worthless in themselves, who form important links. In theology and in philosophy it is much the same: he must not read the Bible and say

what he feels about it; he must unravel Rabbinical and Talmudic tendencies; he must acquaint himself with the heretical leanings of a certain era, and the shadow cast upon the page by apocryphal tradition. In philosophy he is still worse off, because he must plumb the depths of metaphysical jargon and master the criticism of methods.

Now, this is in a degree both right and necessary, because the blind must not attempt to lead the blind; but it is treating the whole thing in too strictly scientific a spirit for all that. The misery of it is that the work of the specialist in all these regions tends to set a hedge about the law; it tends to accumulate and perpetuate a vast amount of inferior work. The result of it is, in literature, for instance, that an immense amount of second-rate and third-rate books go on being reprinted; and instead of the principle of selection being applied to great authors, and their inferior writings being allowed to lapse into oblivion, they go on being re-issued, not because they have any direct value for the human spirit, but because they have a scientific importance from the point of view of development. Yet for the ordinary human being it is far more important that he should read great masterpieces in a spirit of lively and enthusiastic sympathy than that he should wade into them through a mass of archæological and philological detail. As a boy I used to have

to prepare, on occasions, a play of Shakespeare for a holiday task. I have regarded certain plays with a kind of horror ever since, because one ended by learning up the introduction, which concerned itself with the origin of the play, and the notes which illustrated the meaning of such words as "kerns and gallowglasses," and left the action and the poetry and the emotion of the play to take care of themselves. This was due partly to the blighting influence of examination-papers set by men of sterile, conscientious brains, but partly to the terrible value set by British minds upon correct information. The truth really is that if one begins by caring for a work of art, one also cares to understand the medium through which it is conveyed; but if one begins by studying the medium first, one is apt to end by loathing the masterpiece, because of the dusty apparatus that it seems liable to collect about itself.

The result of the influence of the specialist upon literature is that the amateur, hustled from any region where the historical and scientific method can be applied, turns his attention to the field of pure imagination, where he cannot be interfered with. And this, I believe, is one of the reasons why *belles-lettres* in the more precise sense tend to be deserted in favour of fiction. Sympathetic and imaginative criticism is so apt to be stamped upon

by the erudité, who cry out so lamentably over errors and minute slips, that the novel seems to be the only safe vantage-ground in which the amateur may disport himself.

But if the specialist is to the amateur what the hawk is to the dove, let us go further, and in a spirit of love, like Mr. Chadband, inquire what is the effect of specialism on the mind of the specialist. I have had the opportunity of meeting many specialists, and I say unhesitatingly that the effect largely depends upon the natural temperament of the individual. As a general rule, the great specialist is a wise, kindly, humble, delightful man. He perceives that though he has spent his whole life upon a subject or a fraction of a subject, he knows hardly anything about it compared to what there is to know. The track of knowledge glimmers far ahead of him, rising and falling like a road over solitary downs. He knows that it will not be given to him to advance very far upon the path, and he half envies those who shall come after, to whom many things that are dark mysteries to himself will be clear and plain. But he sees, too, how the dim avenues of knowledge reach out in every direction, interlacing and combining, and when he contrasts the tiny powers of the most subtle brain with all the wide range of law—for the knowledge which is to be, not invented, but simply discovered, is all assuredly there, secret and complex as it

seems—there is but little room for complacency or pride. Indeed, I think that a great *savant*, as a rule, feels that instead of being separated by his store of knowledge, as by a wide space that he has crossed, from smaller minds, he is brought closer to the ignorant by the presence of the vast unknown. Instead of feeling that he has soared like a rocket away from the ground, he thinks of himself rather as a flower might think whose head was an inch or two higher than a great company of similar flowers; he has perhaps a wider view; he sees the bounding hedgerow, the distant line of hills, whereas the humbler flower sees little but a forest of stems and blooms, with the light falling dimly between. And a great *savant*, too, is far more ready to credit other people with a wider knowledge than they possess. It is the lesser kind of *savant*, the man of one book, of one province, of one period, who is inclined to think that he is differentiated from the crowd. The great man is far too much preoccupied with real progress to waste time and energy in showing up the mistakes of others. It is the lesser kind of *savant*, jealous of his own reputation, anxious to show his superiority, who loves to censure and deride the feebler brother. If one ever sees a relentless and pitiless review of a book—an exposure, as it is called, by one specialist of another's work—one may be fairly certain that the critic is a minute kind of person.

Again, the great specialist is never anxious to obtrude his subject; he is rather anxious to hear what is going on in other regions of mental activity, regions which he would like to explore, but cannot. It is the lesser light that desires to dazzle and bewilder his company, to tyrannise, to show off. It is the most difficult thing to get a great *savant* to talk about his subject, though, if he is kind and patient, will answer unintelligent questions, and help a feeble mind along, it is one of the most delightful things in the world. I seized the opportunity some little while ago, on finding myself sitting next to a great physicist, of asking him a series of fumbling questions on the subject of modern theories of matter; for an hour I stumbled like a child, supported by a strong hand, in a dim and unfamiliar world, among the mysterious essences of things. I should like to try to reproduce it here, but I have no doubt I should reproduce it all wrong. Still, it was deeply inspiring to look out into chaos, to hear the rush and motion of atoms, moving in vast vortices, to learn that inside the hardest and most impenetrable of substances there was probably a feverish intensity of inner motion. I do not know that I acquired any precise knowledge, but I drank deep draughts of wonder and awe. The great man, with his amused and weary smile, was infinitely gentle, and left me, I will say, far more conscious of the beauty

and the holiness of knowledge. I said something to him about the sense of power that such knowledge must give. "Ah!" he said, "much of what I have told you is not proved, it is only suspected. We are very much in the dark about these things yet. Probably if a physicist of a hundred years hence could overhear me, he would be amazed to think that a sensible man could make such puerile statements. Power—no, it is not that! It rather makes one realise one's feebleness in being so uncertain about things that are absolutely certain and precise in themselves, if we could but see the truth. It is much more like the apostle who said, 'Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief.' The thing one wonders at is the courage of the men who dare to think they *know*."

In one region I own that I dread and dislike the tyranny of the specialist, and that is the region of metaphysical and religious speculation. People who indulge themselves in this form of speculation are apt to be told by theologians and metaphysicians that they ought to acquaint themselves with the trend of theological and metaphysical criticism. It seems to me like telling people that they must not ascend mountains unless they are accompanied by guides, and have studied the history of previous ascents. "Yes," the professional says, "that is just what I mean; it is mere foolhardiness to attempt these arduous

places unless you know exactly what you are about.

To that I reply that no one is bound to go up hills, but that every one who reflects at all is confronted by religious and philosophical problems. We all have to live, and we are all more or less experts in life. When one considers the infinite importance to every human spirit of these problems, and when one further considers how very little theologians and philosophers have ever effected in the direction of enlightening us as to the object of life, the problem of pain and evil, the preservation of identity after death, the question of necessity and free-will, surely, to attempt to silence people on these matters because they have not had a technical training is nothing more than an attempt wilfully to suppress evidence on these points? The only way in which it may be possible to arrive at the solution of these things is to know how they appeal to and affect normal minds. I would rather hear the experience of a life-long sufferer on the problem of pain, or of a faithful lover on the mystery of love, or of a poet on the influence of natural beauty, or of an unselfish and humble saint on the question of faith in the unseen, than the evidence of the most subtle theologian or metaphysician in the world. Many of us, if we are specialists in nothing else, are specialists

in life; we have arrived at a point of view; some particular aspect of things has come home to us with a special force; and what really enriches the hope and faith of the world is the experience of candid and sincere persons. The specialist has often had no time or opportunity to observe life; all he has observed is the thought of other secluded persons, persons whose view has been both narrow and conventional, because they have not had the opportunity of correcting their traditional preconceptions by life itself.

I call, with all the earnestness that I can muster, upon all intelligent, observant, speculative people, who have felt the problems of life weigh heavily upon them, not to be dismayed by the disapproval of technical students, but to come forward and tell us what conclusions they have formed. The work of the trained specialist is essentially, in religion and philosophy, a negative work. He can show us how erroneous beliefs, which coloured the minds of men at certain ages and eras, grew up. He can show us what can be disregarded, as being only the conventional belief of the time; he can indicate, for instance, how a false conception of supernatural interference with natural law grew up in an age when, for want of trained knowledge, facts seemed fortuitous occurrences which were really conditioned by natural laws. The poet and the idealist make and cast abroad

the great vital ideas, which the specialist picks up and analyses. But we must not stop at analysis; we want positive progress as well. We want people to tell us, candidly and simply, how their own soul grew, how it cast off conventional beliefs, how it justified itself in being hopeful or the reverse. There never was a time when more freedom of thought and expression was conceded to the individual. A man is no longer socially banned for being heretical, schismatic, or liberal-minded. I want people to say frankly what real part spiritual agencies or religious ideas have played in their lives, whether such agencies and ideas have modified their conduct, or have been modified by their inclinations and habits. I long to know a thousand things about my fellow-men —how they bear pain, how they confront the prospect of death, the hopes by which they live, the fears that overshadow them, the stuff of their lives, the influence of their emotions. It has long been thought, and it is still thought by many narrow precisians, indelicate and egotistical to do this. And the result is that we can find in books all the things that do not matter, while the thoughts that are of deep and vital interest are withheld.

Such books as Montaigne's *Essays*, Rousseau's *Confessions*, Mrs. Carlyle's *Letters*, Mrs. Oliphant's *Memoirs*, the *Autobiography* of B. R. Haydon,

to name but a few books that come into my mind, are the sort of books that I crave for, because they are books in which one sees right into the heart and soul of another. Men can confess to a book what they cannot confess to a friend. Why should it be necessary to veil this essence of humanity in the dreary melodrama, the trite incident of a novel or a play? Things in life do not happen as they happen in novels or plays. Oliver Twist, in real life, does not get accidentally adopted by his grandfather's oldest friend, and commit his sole burglary in the house of his aunt. We do not want life to be transplanted into trim garden-plots; we want to see it at home, as it grows in all its native wildness, on the one hand; and to know the idea, the theory, the principle that underlie it on the other. How few of us there are who *make* our lives into anything! We accept our limitations, we drift with them, while we indignantly assert the freedom of the will. The best sermon in the world is to hear of one who has struggled with life, bent or trained it to his will, plucked or rejected its fruit, but all upon some principle. It matters little what we do; it matters enormously how we do it. Considering how much has been said, and sung, and written, and recorded, and prated, and imagined, it is strange to think how little is ever told us directly about life; we see

it in glimpses and flashes, through half-open doors, or as one sees it from a train gliding into a great town, and looks into back windows and yards sheltered from the street. We philosophise, most of us, about anything but life; and one of the reasons why published sermons have such vast sales is because, however clumsily and conventionally, it is with life that they try to deal.

This kind of specialising is not recognised as a technical form of it at all, and yet how far nearer and closer and more urgent it is for us than any other kind. I have a hope that we are at the beginning of an era of plain-speaking in these matters. Too often, with the literary standard of decorum which prevails, such self-revelations are brushed aside as morbid; introspective, egotistical. They are no more so than any other kind of investigation, for all investigation is conditioned by the personality of the investigator. All that is needed is that an observer of life should be perfectly candid and sincere, that he should not speak in a spirit of vanity or self-glorification, that he should try to disentangle what are the real motives that make him act or refrain from acting.

As an instance of what I mean by confession of the frankest order, dealing in this case not only with literature but also with morality, let me

take the sorrowful words which Ruskin wrote in his *Præterita*, as a wearied and saddened man, when there was no longer any need for him to pretend anything, or to involve any of his own thoughts or beliefs in any sort of disguise. He took up Shakespeare at Macugnaga, in 1840, and he asks why the loveliest of Shakespeare's plays should be "all mixed and encumbered with languid and common work—to one's best hope spurious certainly, so far as original, idle and disgraceful—and all so inextricably and mysteriously that the writer himself is not only unknowable, but inconceivable; and his wisdom so useless, that at this time of being and speaking, among active and purposeful Englishmen, I know not one who shows a trace of ever having felt a passion of Shakespeare's, or learnt a lesson from him."

That is of course the sad cry of one who is interested in life primarily, and in art only so far as it can minister to life. It may be strained and exaggerated, but how far more vital a saying than to expand in voluble and vapid enthusiasm over the insight and nobleness of Shakespeare, if one has not really felt one's life modified by that mysterious mind!

Of course such self-revelation as I speak of will necessarily fall into the hands of unquiet, dissatisfied, melancholy people. If life is a common-

place and pleasant sort of business, there is nothing particular to say or to think about it. But for all those—and they are many—who feel that life misses, by some blind, inevitable movement, being the gracious and beautiful thing it seems framed to be, how can such as these hold their peace? And how, except by facing it all, and looking patiently and bravely at it, can we find a remedy for its sore sicknesses? That method has been used, and used with success in every other kind of investigation, and we must investigate life too, even if it turns out to be all a kind of Mendelism, moved and swayed by absolutely fixed laws, which take no account of what we sorrowfully desire.

Let us, then, gather up our threads a little. Let us first confront the fact that, under present conditions, in the face of the mass of records and books and accumulated traditions, arts and sciences must make progress little by little, line by line, in skilled technical hands. Fine achievement in every region becomes more difficult every day, because there is so much that is finished and perfected behind us; and if the conditions of our lives call us to some strictly limited path, let us advance wisely and humbly, step by step, without pride or vanity. But let us not forget, in the face of the frigidities of knowledge, that if they are the mechanism of life, emotion and hope and

love and admiration are the steam. Knowledge is only valuable in so far as it makes the force of life effective and vigorous. And thus if we have breasted the strange current of life, or even if we have been ourselves overpowered and swept away by it, let us try, in whatever region we have the power, to let that experience have some value for ourselves and others. If we can say it or write it, so much the better. There are thousands of people moving through the world who are wearied and bewildered, and who are looking out for any message of hope and joy that may give them courage to struggle on; but if we cannot do that, we can at least live life temperately and cheerfully and sincerely: if we have bungled, if we have slipped, we can do something to help others not to go light-heartedly down the miry path; we can raise them up if they have fallen, we can cleanse the stains, or we can at least give them the comfort of feeling that they are not sadly and insupportably alone.

VII

OUR LACK OF GREAT MEN

IT is often mournfully reiterated that the present age is not an age of great men, and I have sometimes wondered if it is true. In the first place I do not feel sure that an age is the best judge of its own greatness; a great age is generally more interested in doing the things which afterwards cause it to be considered great, than in wondering whether it is great. Perhaps the fact that we are on the look-out for great men, and complaining because we cannot find them, is the best proof of our second-rateness; I do not imagine that the Elizabethan writers were much concerned with thinking whether they were great or not; they were much more occupied in having a splendid time, and in saying as eagerly as they could all the delightful thoughts which came crowding to the utterance, than in pondering whether they were worthy of admiration. In the annals of the Renaissance one gets almost weary of the records of brilliant persons, like Leo Battista Alberti and Leonardo da Vinci, who were architects, sculptors, painters, musicians, athletes, and writers all in one;

who could make crowds weep by twanging a lute, ride the most vicious horses, take standing jumps over the heads of tall men, and who were, moreover, so impressionable that books were to them as jewels and flowers, and who "grew faint at the sight of sunsets and stately persons." Such as these, we may depend upon it, had little time to give to considering their own effect upon posterity. When the sun rules the day, there is no question about his supremacy ; it is when we are concerned with scanning the sky for lesser lights to rule the night that we are wasting time. To go about searching for somebody to inspire one testifies, no doubt, to a certain lack of fire and initiative. But, on the other hand, there have been many great men whose greatness their contemporaries did not recognise. We tend at the present time to honour achievements when they have begun to grow a little mouldy ; we seldom accord ungrudging admiration to a prophet when he is at his best. Moreover, in an age like the present, when the general average of accomplishment is remarkably high, it is more difficult to detect greatness. It is easier to see big trees when they stand out over a copse than when they are lost in the depths of the forest.

Now there are two modes and methods of being great ; one is by largeness, the other by intensity. A great man can be cast in a big, magnanimous

mould, without any very special accomplishments or abilities; it may be very difficult to praise any of his faculties very highly, but he is there. Such men are the natural leaders of mankind; they effect what they effect not by any subtlety or ingenuity. They see in a wide, general way what they want, they gather friends and followers and helpers round them, and put the right man on at the right piece of work. They perform what they perform by a kind of voluminous force, which carries other personalities away; for lesser natures, as a rule, do not like supreme responsibility; they enjoy what is to ordinary people the greatest luxury in the world, namely, the being sympathetically commandeered, and duly valued. Inspiration and leadership are not common gifts, and there are abundance of capable people who cannot strike out a novel line of their own, but can do excellent work if they can be inspired and led. I was once for a short time brought into close contact with a man of this kind; it was impossible to put down on paper or to explain to those who did not know him what his claim to greatness was. I remember being asked by an incredulous outsider where his greatness lay, and I could not name a single conspicuous quality that my hero possessed. But he dominated his circle for all that, and many of them were men of far greater intellectual force than himself. He had his own

way; if he asked one to do a particular thing, one felt proud to be entrusted with it, and amply rewarded by a word of approval. It was possible to take a different view from the view which he took of a matter or a situation, but it was impossible to express one's dissent in his presence. A few halting, fumbling words of his were more weighty than many a facile and voluble oration. Personally I often mistrusted his judgment, but I followed him with an eager delight. With such men as these, posterity is often at a loss to know why they impressed their contemporaries, or why they continue to be spoken of with reverence and enthusiasm. The secret is that it is a kind of moral and magnetic force, and the lamentable part of it is that such men, if they are not enlightened and wise, may do more harm than good, because they tend to stereotype what ought to be changed and renewed.

That is one way of greatness; a sort of big, blunt force that overwhelms and uplifts, like a great sea-roller, yielding at a hundred small points, yet crowding onwards in soft volume and ponderous weight.

Two interesting examples of this impressive and indescribable greatness seem to have been Arthur Hallam and the late Mr. W. E. Henley. In the case of Arthur Hallam, the eulogies which his friends pronounced upon him seem couched in

terms of an intemperate extravagance. The fact that the most splendid panegyrics upon him were uttered by men of high genius is not in itself more conclusive than if such panegyrics had been conceived by men of lesser quality, because the greater that a man is the more readily does he perceive and more magniloquently acknowledge greatness. Apart from *In Memoriam*, Tennyson's recorded utterances about Arthur Hallam are expressed in terms of almost hyperbolical laudation. I once was fortunate enough to have the opportunity of asking Mr. Gladstone about Arthur Hallam. Mr. Gladstone had been his close friend at Eton and his constant companion. His eye flashed, his voice gathered volume, and with a fine gesture of his hand he said that he could only deliberately affirm that physically, intellectually, and morally, Arthur Hallam approached more nearly to an ideal of human perfection than any one whom he had ever seen. And yet the picture of Hallam at Eton represents a young man of an apparently solid and commonplace type, with a fresh colour, and almost wholly destitute of distinction or charm; while his extant fragments of prose and poetry are heavy, verbose, and elaborate, and without any memorable quality. It appears indeed as if he had exercised a sort of hypnotic influence upon his contemporaries. Neither does he seem to have produced a very gracious impression upon

outsiders who happened to meet him. There is a curious anecdote told by some one who met Arthur Hallam travelling with his father on the Continent only a short time before his sudden death. The narrator says that he saw with a certain satisfaction how mercilessly the young man criticised and exposed his father's statements, remembering how merciless the father had often been in dealing summarily with the arguments and statements of his own contemporaries. One asks oneself in vain what the magnetic charm of his presence and temperament can have been. It was undoubtedly there, and yet it seems wholly irrecoverable. The same is true, in a different region, with the late Mr. W. E. Henley. His literary performances, with the exception of some half-a-dozen poetical pieces, have no great permanent value. His criticisms were vehement and complacent, but represent no great delicacy of analysis nor breadth of view. His treatment of Stevenson, considering the circumstances of the case, was ungenerous and irritable. Yet those who were brought into close contact with Henley recognised something magnanimous, noble, and fiery about him, which evoked a passionate devotion. I remember shortly before his death reading an appreciation of his work by a faithful admirer, who described him as "another Dr. Johnson," and speaking of his critical judgment,

said, "Mr. Henley is pontifical in his wrath; it pleased him, for example, to deny to De Quincey the title to write English prose." That a criticism so arrogant, so *saugrenu*, should be re-echoed with such devoted commendation is a proof that the writer's independent judgment was simply swept away by Henley's personality; and in both these cases one is merely brought face to face with the fact that though men can earn the admiration of the world by effective performance, the most spontaneous and enduring gratitude is given to individuality.

The other way of greatness is the way of intensity, that focuses all its impact at some brilliant point, like a rapier-thrust or a flash of lightning. Men with this kind of greatness have generally some supreme and dazzling accomplishment, and the rest of their nature is often sacrificed to one radiant faculty. Their power, in some one single direction, is absolutely distinct and unquestioned; and these are the men who, if they can gather up and express the forces of some vague and widespread tendency, some blind and instinctive movement of men's minds, form as it were the cutting edge of a weapon. They do not supply the force, but they concentrate it; and it is men of this type who are often credited with the bringing about of some profound and revolutionary change, because they summarise and define some huge force that

is abroad. Not to travel far for instances, such a man was Rousseau. The air of his period was full of sentiments and emotions and ideas; he was not himself a man of force; he was a dreamer and a poet; but he had the matchless gift of ardent expression, and he was able to say both trenchantly and attractively exactly what every one was vaguely meditating.

Now let us take some of the chief departments of human effort, some of the provinces in which men attain supreme fame, and consider what kinds of greatness we should expect the present day to evoke. In the department of warfare, we have had few opportunities of late to discover high strategical genius. Our navy has been practically unemployed, and the South African war was just the sort of campaign to reveal the deficiencies of an elaborate and not very practical peace establishment. Though it solidified a few reputations and pricked the bubble of some few others, it certainly did not reveal any subtle adaptability in our generals. It was Lord North, I think, who, when discussing with his Cabinet a list of names of officers suggested for the conduct of a campaign, said, "I do not know what effect these names produce upon you, gentlemen, but I confess they make me tremble." The South African war can hardly be said to have revealed that we have many generals who closely corresponded to Wordsworth's description of the Happy Warrior,

but rather induced the tremulousness which Lord North experienced. Still, if, in the strategical region, our solitary recent campaign rather tends to prove a deficiency of men of supreme gifts, it at all events proved a considerable degree of competence and devotion. I could not go so far as a recent writer who regretted the termination of the Boer War because it interrupted the evolution of tactical science, but it is undoubtedly true that the growing aversion to war, the intense dislike to the sacrifice of human life, creates an atmosphere unfavourable to the development of high military genius; because great military reputations in times past have generally been acquired by men who had no such scruples, but who treated the material of their armies as pawns to be freely sacrificed to the attainment of victory.

Then there is the region of statesmanship; and here it is abundantly clear that the social conditions of the day, the democratic current which runs with increasing spirit in political channels, is unfavourable to the development of individual genius. The prize falls to the sagacious opportunist; the statesman is less and less of a navigator, and more and more of a pilot, in times when popular feeling is conciliated and interpreted rather than inspired and guided. To be far-seeing and daring is a disadvantage; the most approved leader is the man who can harmonise discordant

sections, and steer round obvious and pressing difficulties. Geniality and *bonhomie* are more valuable qualities than prescience or nobility of aim. The more representative that government becomes, the more does originality give place to malleability. The more fluid that the conceptions of a statesman are, the greater that his adaptability is, the more acceptable he becomes. Since Lord Beaconsfield, with all his trenchant mystery, and Mr. Gladstone, with his voluble candour, there have been no figures of unquestioned supremacy on the political stage. Even so, the effect in both cases was to a great extent the effect of personality. The further that these two men retire into the past, the more that they are judged by the written record, the more does the tawdriness of Lord Beaconsfield's mind, his absence of sincere convictions appear, as well as the pedestrianism of Mr. Gladstone's mind, and his lack of critical perception. I have heard Mr. Gladstone speak, and on one occasion I had the task of reporting for a daily paper a private oration on a literary subject. I was thrilled to the very marrow of my being by the address. The parchment pallor of the orator, his glowing and blazing eyes, his leonine air, the voice that seemed to have a sort of physical effect on the nerves, his great sweeping gestures, all held the audience spell-bound. I felt at the time that I had never before realised the supreme and vital importance of the

subject on which he spoke. But when I tried to reconstruct from the ashes of my industrious notes the mental conflagration which I had witnessed, I was at a complete loss to understand what had happened. The records were not only dull, they seemed essentially trivial, and almost overwhelmingly unimportant. But the magic had been there. Apart from the substance, the performance had been literally enchanting. I do not honestly believe that Mr. Gladstone was a man of great intellectual force, or even of very deep emotions. He was a man of extraordinarily vigorous and robust brain, and he was a supreme oratorical artist.

There is intellect, charm, humour in abundance in the parliamentary forces; there was probably never a time when there were so many able and ambitious men to be found in the rank and file of parliamentarians. But that is not enough. There is no supremely impressive and commanding figure on the stage; greatness seems to be distributed rather than concentrated; but probably neither this, nor political conditions, would prevent the generous recognition of supreme genius, if it were there to recognise.

In art and literature, I am inclined to believe that we shall look back to the Victorian era as a time of great activity and high performance. The two tendencies here which militate against the appearance of the greatest figures are, in the first place,

the great accumulations of art and literature, and in the second place the democratic desire to share those treasures. The accumulation of pictures, music, and books makes it undoubtedly very hard for a new artist, in whatever region, to gain prestige. There is so much that is undoubtedly great and good for a student of art and literature to make acquaintance with, that we are apt to be content with the old vintages. The result is that there are a good many artists who in a time of less productivity would have made themselves an enduring reputation, and who now must be content to be recognised only by a few. The difficulty can, I think, only be met by some principle of selection being more rigidly applied. We shall have to be content to skim the cream of the old as well as of the new, and to allow the second-rate work of first-rate performers to sink into oblivion. But at the same time there might be a great future before any artist who could discover a new medium of utterance. It seems at present, to take literature, as if every form of human expression had been exploited. We have the lyric, the epic, the satire, the narrative, the letter, the diary, conversation, all embalmed in art. But there is probably some other medium possible which will become perfectly obvious the moment it is seized upon and used. To take an instance from pictorial art. At present, colour is only used in a

genre manner, to clothe some dramatic motive. But there seems no *prima facie* reason why colour should not be used symphonically like music. In music we obtain pleasure from an orderly sequence of vibrations, and there seems no real reason why the eye should not be charmed with colour-sequences just as the ear is charmed with sound-sequences. So in literature it would seem as though we might get closer still to the expression of mere personality, by the medium of some sublimated form of reverie, the thought blended and tinged in the subtlest gradations, without the clumsy necessity of sacrificing the sequence of thought to the barbarous devices of metre and rhyme, or to the still more childish devices of incident and drama. Flaubert, it will be remembered, looked forward to a time when a writer would not require a subject at all, but would express emotion and thought directly rather than pictorially. To utter the unuttered thought—that is really the problem of literature in the future; and if a writer could be found to free himself from all stereotyped forms of expression, and to give utterance to the strange texture of thought and fancy, which differentiates each single personality so distinctly, so integrally, from other personalities, and which we cannot communicate to our dearest and nearest, he might enter upon a new province of art.

But the second tendency which at the present moment dominates writers is, as I have said, the rising democratic interest in the things of the mind. This is at present a very inchoate and uncultivated interest: but in days of cheap publication and large audiences it dominates many writers disastrously. The temptation is a grievous one—to take advantage of a market—not to produce what is absolutely the best, but what is popular and effective. It is not a wholly ignoble temptation. It is not only the temptation of wealth, though in an age of comfort, which values social respectability so highly, wealth is a great temptation. But the temptation is rather to gauge success by the power of appeal. If a man has ideas at all, he is naturally anxious to make them felt; and if he can do it best by spreading his ideas rather thinly, by making them attractive to enthusiastic people of inferior intellectual grip, he feels he is doing a noble work. The truth is that in literature the democracy desires not ideas but morality. All the best-known writers of the Victorian age have been optimistic moralists, Browning, Ruskin, Carlyle, Tennyson. They have been admired because they concealed their essential conventionality under a slight perfume of unorthodoxy. They all in reality pandered to the complacency of the age, in a way in which Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats did not

pander. The democracy loves to be assured that it is generous, high-minded, and sensible. It is in reality timid, narrow-minded, and Pharisaical. It hates independence and originality, and loves to believe that it adores both. It loves Mr. Kipling because he assures them that vulgarity is not a sin; it loves Mr. Bernard Shaw because he persuades them that they are cleverer than they imagined. The fact is that great men, in literature at all events, must be content, at the present time, to be unrecognised and unacclaimed. They must be content to be of the happy company of whom Mr. Swinburne writes:—

"In the garden of death, where the singers, whose names are deathless,
One with another make music unheard of men."

Then there is the region of Science, and here I am not qualified to speak, because I know no science, and have not even taught it, as Mr. Arthur Sidgwick said. I do not really know what constitutes greatness in science. I suppose that the great man of science is the man who to a power of endlessly patient investigation joins a splendid imaginative, or perhaps deductive power, like Newton or Darwin. But we who stand at the threshold of the scientific era are perhaps too near the light, and too much dazzled by the results of scientific discovery to say who is great and who is not great. I have met several dis-

tinguished men of science, and I have thought some of them to be men of obviously high intellectual gifts, and some of them men of inert and secretive temperaments. But that is only natural, for to be great in other departments generally implies a certain knowledge of the world, or at all events of the thought of the world; whereas the great man of science may be moving in regions of thought that may be absolutely incommunicable to the ordinary person. But I do not suppose that scientific greatness is a thing which can be measured by the importance of the practical results of a discovery. I mean that a man may hit upon some process, or some treatment of disease, which may be of incalculable benefit to humanity, and yet not be really a great man of science, only a fortunate discoverer, and incidentally a great benefactor to humanity. The unknown discoverers of things like the screw or the wheel, persons lost in the mists of antiquity, could not, I suppose, be ranked as great men of science. The great man of science is the man who can draw some stupendous inference, which revolutionises thought and sets men hopefully at work on some problem which does not so much add to the convenience of humanity as define the laws of nature. We are still surrounded by innumerable and awful mysteries of life and being; the evidence which will lead to their solution is probably in our hands and plain

enough, if any one could but see the bearing of facts which are known to the simplest child. There is little doubt, I suppose, that the greatest reputations of recent years have been made in Science; and perhaps when our present age has globed itself into a cycle, we shall be amazed at the complaint that the present era is lacking in great men. We are busy in looking for greatness in so many directions, and we are apt to suppose, from long use, that greatness is so inseparably connected with some form of human expression, whether it be the utterance of thought, or the marshalling of armies, that we may be overlooking a more stable form of greatness, which will be patent to those that come after. My own belief is that the condition of science at the present day answers best to the conditions which we have learnt to recognise in the past as the fruitful soil of greatness. I mean that when we put our finger, in the past, on some period which seems to have been producing great work in a great way, we generally find it in some knot or school of people, intensely absorbed in what they were doing, and doing it with a whole-hearted enjoyment, loving the work more than the rewards of it, and indifferent to the pursuit of fame. Such it seems to me is the condition of science at the present time, and it is in science, I am inclined to think, that our heroes are probably to be found.

I do not, then, feel at all sure that we are lacking

in great men, though it must be admitted that we are lacking in men whose supremacy is recognised. I suppose we mean by a great man one who in some region of human performance is confessedly pre-eminent; and he must further have a theory of his own, and a power of pursuing that theory in the face of depreciation and even hostility. I do not think that great men have often been indifferent to criticism. Often, indeed, by virtue of a greater sensitiveness and a keener perception, they have been profoundly affected by unpopularity and the sense of being misunderstood. Carlyle, Tennyson, Ruskin, for instance, were men of almost morbid sensibility, and lived in sadness; and, on the other hand, there are few great men who have not been affected for the worse by premature success. The best soil for greatness to grow up in would seem to be an early isolation, sustained against the disregard of the world by the affection and admiration of a few kindred minds. Then when the great man has learned his method and his message, and learned too not to over-value the popular verdict, success may mature and mellow his powers. Yet of how many great men can this be said? As a rule, indeed, a great man's best work has been done in solitude and disfavour, and he has attained his sunshine when he can no longer do his best work.

The question is whether the modern conditions of life are unfavourable to greatness; and I think that it must be confessed that they are. In the first place, we all know so much too about each other, and there is so eager a personal curiosity abroad, a curiosity about the smallest details of the life of any one who seems to have any power of performance, that it encourages men to over-confidence, egotism, and mannerism. Again, the world is so much in love with novelty and sensation of all kinds, that facile successes are easily made and as easily obliterated. What so many people admire is not greatness, but the realisation of greatness and its tangible rewards. The result of this is that men who show any faculty for impressing the world are exploited and caressed, are played with as a toy, and as a toy neglected. And then, too, the age is deeply permeated by social ambitions. Men love to be labelled, ticketed, decorated, differentiated from the crowd. Newspapers pander to this taste; and then the ease and rapidity of movement tempt men to a restless variety of experience, of travel, of society, of change, which is alien to the settled and sober temper in which great designs are matured. There is a story, not uncharacteristic, of modern social life, of a hostess who loved to assemble about her, in the style of Mrs. Leo Hunter, notabilities small and great, who was reduced to

presenting a young man who made his appearance at one of her gatherings as "Mr. ——, whose uncle, you will remember, was so terribly mangled in the railway accident at S——." It is this feverish desire to be distinguished at any price which has its counterpart in the feverish desire to find objects of admiration. Not so can solid greatness be achieved.

The plain truth is that no one can become great by taking thought, and still less by desiring greatness. It is not an attainable thing; fame only is attainable. A man must be great in his own quiet way, and the greater he is, the less likely is he to concern himself with fame. It is useless to try and copy some one else's greatness; that is like trying to look like some one else's portrait, even if it be a portrait by Velasquez. Not that modesty is inseparable from greatness; there are abundance of great men who have been childishly and grotesquely vain; but in such cases it has been a greatness of performance, a marvellous faculty, not a greatness of soul. Hazlitt says somewhere that modesty is the lowest of the virtues, and a real confession of the deficiency which it indicates. He adds that a man who underrates himself is justly undervalued by others. This is a cynical and a vulgar maxim. It is true that a great man must have a due sense of the dignity and importance of his work; but if he is

truly great, he will have also a sense of relation and proportion, and not forget the minuteness of any individual atom. If he has a real greatness of soul, he will not be apt to compare himself with others, and he will be inclined to an even over-generous estimate of the value of the work of others. In no respect was the greatness of D. G. Rossetti more exemplified than in his almost extravagant appreciation of the work of his friends; and it was to this royalty of temperament that he largely owed his personal supremacy.

I would believe then that the lack of conspicuous greatness is due at this time to the over-abundant vitality and eagerness of the world, rather than to any languor or listlessness of spirit. The rise of the decadent school in art and literature is not the least sign of any indolent or corrupt deterioration. It rather shows a desperate appetite for testing sensation, a fierce hunger for emotional experience, a feverish ambition to impress a point-of-view. It is all part of a revolt against settled ways and conventional theories. I do not mean that we can expect to find greatness in this direction, for greatness is essentially well-balanced, calm, deliberate, and decadence is a sign of a neurotic and over-vitalised activity.

Our best hope is that this excessive restlessness of spirit will produce a revolt against itself. The essence of greatness is unconventionality, and

restlessness is now becoming conventional. In education, in art, in literature, in politics, in social life, we lose ourselves in denunciations of the dreamer and the loafer. We cannot bear to see a slowly-moving, deliberate, self-contained spirit, advancing quietly on its discerned path. Instead of being content to perform faithfully and conscientiously our allotted task, which is the way in which we can best help the world, we demand that every one should want to do good, to be responsible for some one else, to exhort, urge, beckon, restrain, manage. That is all utterly false and hectic. Our aim should be patience rather than effectiveness, sincerity rather than adaptability, to learn rather than to teach, to ponder rather than to persuade, to know the truth rather than to create illusion, however comforting, however delightful such illusion may be.

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VIII

SHYNESS

I HAVE no doubt that shyness is one of the old, primitive, aboriginal qualities that lurk in human nature—one of the crude elements that ought to have been uprooted by civilisation, and security, and progress, and enlightened ideals, but which have not been uprooted, and are only being slowly eliminated. It is seen, as all aboriginal qualities are seen, at its barest among children, who often reflect the youth of the world, and are like little wild animals or infant savages, in spite of all the frenzied idealisation that childhood receives from well-dressed and amiable people.

Shyness is thus like those little bits of woods and copses which one finds in a country-side that has long been subdued and replenished, turned into arable land and pasture, with all the wildness and the irregularity ploughed and combed out of it; but still one comes upon some piece of dingle, where there is perhaps an awkward tilt in the ground, on some ancient excavation, or where a stream-head has cut out a steep channel, and there one finds a scrap of

the old forest, a rood or two that has never been anything but woodland. So with shyness; many of our old, savage qualities have been smoothed out, or glazed over, by education and inheritance, and only emerge in moments of passion and emotion. But shyness is no doubt the old suspicion of the stranger, the belief that his motives are likely to be predatory and sinister; it is the tendency to bob the head down into the brushwood, or to sneak behind the tree-bole on his approach. One sees a little child, washed and brushed and delicately apparelled, with silken locks and clear complexion, brought into a drawing-room to be admired; one sees the terror come upon her; she knows by experience that she has nothing to expect but attention, and admiration, and petting; but you will see her suddenly cover her face with a tiny hand, relapse into dismal silence, even burst into tears and refuse to be comforted, till she is safely entrenched upon some familiar knee.

I have a breezy, boisterous, cheerful friend, of transparent simplicity and goodness, who has never known the least touch of shyness from his cradle, who always says, if the subject is introduced, that shyness is all mere self-consciousness, and that it comes from thinking about oneself. That is true, in a limited degree; but the diagnosis is no remedy for the disease, be-

cause shyness is as much a disease as a cold in the head, and no amount of effort can prevent the attacks of the complaint; the only remedy is either to avoid the occasions of the attacks,—and that is impossible, unless one is to abjure the society of other people for good and all;—or else to practise resolutely the hardening process of frequenting society, until one gets a sort of courage out of familiarity. Yet even so, who that has ever really suffered from shyness does not feel his heart sink as he drives up in a brougham to the door of some strange house, and sees a grave butler advancing out of an unknown corridor, with figures flitting to and fro in the background; what shy person is there who at such a moment would not give a considerable sum to be able to go back to the station and take the first train home? Or who again, as he gives his name to a servant in some brightly-lighted hall, and advances, with a hurried glance at his toilet, into a roomful of well-dressed people, buzzing with what Rossetti calls a "din of doubtful talk," would not prefer to sink into the earth like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and be reckoned no more among the living?

It is recorded in Tennyson's Life that he used to recommend to a younger brother the thought of the stellar spaces, swarming with constellations and traversed by planets at ineffable distances, as

a cure for shyness ; and a lady of my acquaintance used to endeavour as a girl to stay her failing heart on the thought of Eternity at such moments. It is all in vain ; at the urgent moment one cares very little about the stellar motions, or the dim vistas of futurity, and very much indeed about the cut of one's coat, and the appearance of one's collar, and the glances of one's enemies ; the doctrines of the Church, and the prospects of ultimate salvation, are things very light in the scales in comparison with the pressing necessities of the crisis, and the desperate need to appear wholly unconcerned !

The wild and fierce shyness of childhood is superseded in most sensitive people, as life goes on, by a very different feeling—the shyness of adolescence, of which the essence, as has been well said, is "a shamefaced pride." The shyness of early youth is a thing which springs from an intense desire to delight, and impress, and interest other people, from wanting to play a far larger and brighter part in the lives of every one else than any one in the world plays in any one else's life. Who does not recognise, with a feeling that is half contempt and half compassion, the sight of the eager pretentiousness of youth, the intense shame of confessing ignorance on any point, the deep desire to appear to have a stake in the world, and a well-defined, respected position ? I met the

other day a young man, of no particular force or distinction, who was standing in a corner at a big social gathering, bursting with terror and importance combined. He was inspired, I would fain believe, by discerning a vague benevolence in my air and demeanour, to fix his attention on me. He had been staying at a house where there had been some important guests, and by some incredibly rapid transition of eloquence he was saying to me in a minute or two, "The Commander-in-Chief said to me the other day," and "The Archbishop pointed out to me a few days ago," giving, as personal confidences, scraps of conversation which he had no doubt overheard as an unwelcome adjunct to a crowded smoking-room, with the busy and genial elders wondering when the boys would have the grace to go to bed. My heart bled for him as I saw the reflection of my own pushing and pretentious youth, and I only desired that the curse should not fall upon him which has so often fallen upon myself, to recall ineffaceably, with a blush that still mantles my cheek in the silence and seclusion of my bedroom, in a wakeful hour, the thought of some such piece of transparent and ridiculous self-importance, shamefully uttered by myself, in a transport of ambitious vanity, long years ago. How out of proportion to the offence is the avenging phantom of memory which dogs one

through the years for such stupidities! I remember that as a youthful undergraduate I went to stay in the house of an old family friend in the neighbourhood of Cambridge. The only other male guest was a grim and crusty don, sharp and trenchant in speech, and with a determination to keep young men in their place. At Cambridge he would have taken no notice whatever of me; but there, on alien ground, with some lurking impulse of far-off civility, he said to me when the ladies retired, "I am going to have a cigar; you know your way to the smoking-room?" I did not myself smoke in those days, so foolish was I and innocent; but recalling, I suppose, some similar remark made by an elderly and genial non-smoker under the same circumstances, I said pompously —I can hardly bring myself even now to write the words—"I don't smoke, but I will come and sit with you for the pleasure of a talk." He gave a derisive snort, looked at me and said, "What! not allowed to smoke yet? Pray don't trouble to come on my account." It was not a genial speech, and it made me feel, as it was intended to do, insupportably silly. I did not make matters better, I recollect, on the following day, when on returning to Cambridge I offered to carry his bag up from the station, for he insisted on walking. He refused testily, and no doubt thought me, as in fact I was, a very spiritless young man.

I remember, too, another incident of the same kind, happening about the same time. I was invited by a fellow-undergraduate to come to tea in his rooms, and to meet his people. After tea, in the lightness of his heart, my friend performed some singular antics, such as standing on his head like a clown, and falling over the back of his sofa, alighting on his feet. I, who would not have executed such gambols for the world in the presence of the fairer sex, but anxious in an elderly way to express my sympathy with the performer, said, with what was meant to be a polite admiration: "I can't think how you do that!" Upon which a shrewd and trenchant maiden-aunt who was present, and was delighting in the exuberance of her nephew, said to me briskly, "Mr. Benson, have you never been young?" I should be ashamed to say how often since I have arranged a neat repartee to that annoying question. At the same time I think that the behaviour both of the don and the aunt was distinctly unjust and unadvisable. I am sure that the one way to train young people out of the miseries of shyness is for older people never to snub them in public, or make them appear in the light of a fool. Such snubs fall plentifully and naturally from contemporaries. An elder person is quite within his rights in inflicting a grave and serious remonstrance in private. I do not believe that young

people ever resent that, if at the same time they are allowed to defend themselves and state their case. But a merciless elder who inflicts a public mortification is terribly unassailable and impregnable. For the shy person, who is desperately anxious to bear a sympathetic part, is quite incapable of retort; and that is why such assaults are unpardonable, because they are the merest bullying.

The nicest people that I have known in life have been the people of kindly and sensible natures, who have been thoroughly spoilt as children, encouraged to talk, led to expect not only toleration, but active kindness and sympathy from all. The worst of it is that such kindness is generally reserved for pretty and engaging children, and it is the awkward, unpleasing, ungainly child who gets the slaps in public. But, as in Tennyson-Turner's pretty poem of "Letty's Globe," a child's hand should be "welcome at all frontiers." Only deliberate rudeness and insolence on the part of children should be publicly rebuked; and as a matter of fact both rudeness and insolence are far oftener the result of shyness than is easily supposed.

After the shyness of adolescence there often follows a further stage. The shy person has learnt a certain wisdom; he becomes aware how easily he detects pretentiousness in other people,

and realises that there is nothing to be gained by claiming a width of experience which he does not possess, and that the being unmasked is even more painful than feeling deficient and ill-equipped. Then too he learns to suspect that when he has tried to be impressive, he has often only succeeded in being priggish; and the result is that he falls into a kind of speechlessness, comforting himself, as he sits mute and awkward, unduly elongated, and with unaccountable projections of limb and feature, that if only other people were a little less self-absorbed, had the gift of perceiving hidden worth and real character, and could pierce a little below the surface, they would realise what reserves of force and tenderness lay beneath the heavy shapelessness of which he is still conscious. Then is the time for the shy person to apply himself to social gymnastics. He is not required to be voluble; but if he will practise bearing a hand, seeing what other people need and like, carrying on their line of thought, constructing small conversational bridges, asking the right questions, perhaps simulating an interest in the pursuits of others which he does not naturally feel, he may unloose the burden from his back. Then is the time to practise a sympathetic smile, or better still to allow oneself to indicate and even express the sympathy one feels; and the experimentalist will soon become aware how welcome such un-

obtrusive sympathy is. He will be amazed at first to find that, instead of being tolerated, he will be confided in; he will be regarded as a pleasant adjunct to a party, and he will soon have the even pleasanter experience of finding that his own opinions and adventures, if they are not used to cap and surpass the opinions and adventures of others, but to elicit them, will be duly valued. Yet, alas, a good many shy people never reach that stage, but take refuge in a critical and fastidious attitude. I had an elderly relative of this kind—who does not know the type?—who was a man of wide interests and accurate information, but a perfect terror in the domestic circle. He was too shy to mingle in general talk, but sat with an air of acute observation, with a dry smile playing over his face; later on, when the circle diminished, it pleased him to retail the incautious statements made by various members of the party, and correct them with much acerbity. There are few things more terrific than a man who is both speechless and distinguished. I have known several such, and their presence lies like a blight over the most cheerful party. It is unhappily often the case that shyness is apt to exist side by side with considerable ability, and a shy man of this type regards distinction as a kind of defensive armour, which may justify him in applying to others the contempt which he has himself been conscious

of incurring. One of the most disagreeable men I know is a man of great ability, who was bullied in his youth. The result upon him has been that he tends to believe that most people are inspired by a vague malevolence, and he uses his ability and his memory, not to add to the pleasure of a party, but to make his own power felt. I have seen this particular man pass from an ungainly speechlessness into brutal onslaughts on inoffensive persons; and it is one of the most unpleasant transformations in the world. On the other hand, the modest and amiable man of distinction is one of the most agreeable figures it is possible to encounter. He is kind and deferential, and the indulgent deference of a distinguished man is worth its weight in gold.

I was lately told a delightful story of a great statesman staying with a humble and anxious host, who had invited a party of simple and unimportant people to meet the great man. The statesman came in late for dinner, and was introduced to the party; he made a series of old-fashioned bows in all directions, but no one felt in a position to offer any observations. The great man, at the conclusion of the ceremony, turned to his host, and said, in tones that had often thrilled a listening senate: "What very convenient jugs you have in your bedrooms! They pour well!" The social frost broke up; the company were delighted to

find that the great man was interested in mundane matters of a kind on which every one might be permitted to have an opinion, and the conversation, starting from the humblest conveniences of daily life, melted insensibly into more liberal subjects. The fact is that, in ordinary life, kindness and simplicity are valued far more than brilliance; and the best brilliance is that which throws a novel and lambent light upon ordinary topics, rather than the brilliance which disports itself in unfamiliar and exalted regions. The hero only ceases to be a hero to his valet if he is too lofty-minded to enter into the workings of his valet's mind, and cannot duly appraise the quality of his services.

And then, too, to go back a little, there are certain defects, after all, which are appropriate at different times of life. A certain degree of shyness and even awkwardness is not at all a disagreeable thing—indeed it is rather a desirable quality—in the young. A perfectly self-possessed and voluble young man arouses in one a vague sense of hostility, unless it is accompanied by great modesty and ingenuousness. The artless prattler, who, in his teens, has an opinion on all subjects, and considers that opinion worth expressing, is pleasant enough, and saves one some embarrassment; but such people, alas, too often degenerate into the bores of later life. If a man's opinion is eventually going to be worth anything, he ought, I think, to pass through a

tumultuous and even prickly stage, when he believes that he has an opinion, but cannot find the *aplomb* to formulate it. He ought to be feeling his way, to be in a vague condition of revolt against what is conventional. This is likely to be true not only in his dealings with his elders, but also in his dealings with his contemporaries. Young people are apt to regard a youthful *doctrinaire*, who has an opinion on everything, with sincere abhorrence. He bores them, and to the young boredom is not a condition of passive suffering, it is an acute form of torture. Moreover, the stock of opinions which a young man holds are apt to be parrot-cries repeated without any coherence from talks overheard and books skimmed. But in a modest and ingenuous youth, filled to the brim with eager interest and alert curiosity, a certain deference is an adorable thing, one of the most delicate of graces; and it is a delightful task for an older person, who feels the sense of youthful charm, to melt stiffness away by kindly irony and gentle provocation, as Socrates did with his sweet-natured and modest boy-friends, so many centuries ago.

The *aplomb* of the young generally means complacency; but one who is young and shy, and yet has the grace to think about the convenience and pleasure of others, can be the most perfect companion in the world. One has then a sense of the brave and unsophisticated freshness of

youth, that believes all things and hopes all things, the bloom of which has not been rubbed away by the rough touch of the world. It is only when that shyness is prolonged beyond the appropriate years, when it leaves a well-grown and hard-featured man gasping and incoherent, jerky and ungracious, that it is a painful and disconcerting deformity. The only real shadow of early shyness is the quite disproportionate amount of unhappiness that conscious *gaucherie* brings with it. Two incidents connected with a ceremony most fruitful in nervousness come back to my mind.

When I was an Eton boy, I was staying with a country squire, a most courteous old gentleman with a high temper. The first morning, I contrived to come down a minute or two late for prayers. There was no chair for me. The Squire suspended his reading of the Bible with a deadly sort of resignation, and made a gesture to the portly butler. That functionary rose from his own chair, and with loudly creaking boots carried it across the room for my acceptance. I sat down, covered with confusion. The butler returned; and two footmen, who were sitting on a little form, made reluctant room for him. The butler sat down on one end of the form, unfortunately before his equipoise, the second footman, had taken his place at the other end. The result was that the form tipped up, and a

cataract of flunkies poured down upon the floor. There was a ghastly silence; then the Gadarene herd slowly recovered itself, and resumed its place. The Squire read the chapter in an accent of suppressed fury, while the remainder of the party, with handkerchiefs pressed to their faces, made the most unaccountable sounds and motions for the rest of the proceeding. I was really comparatively guiltless, but the shadow of that horrid event sensibly clouded the whole of my visit.

I was only a spectator of the other event. We had assembled for prayers in the dimly-lighted hall of the house of a church dignitary, and the chapter had begun, when a man of almost murderous shyness, who was a guest, opened his bedroom door and came down the stairs. Our host suspended his reading. The unhappy man came down, but, instead of slinking to his place, went and stood in front of the fire, under the impression that the proceedings had not taken shape, and addressed some remarks upon the weather to his hostess. In the middle of one of his sentences, he suddenly divined the situation, on seeing the row of servants sitting in a thievish corner of the hall. He took his seat with the air of a man driving to the guillotine, and I do not think I ever saw any one so much upset as he was for the remainder of his stay. Of course it may be said that a sense of

humour should have saved a man from such a collapse of moral force, but a sense of humour requires to be very strong to save a man from the sense of having made a conspicuous fool of himself.

I would add one more small reminiscence, of an event from which I can hardly say with honesty that I have yet quite recovered, although it took place nearly thirty years ago. I went, as a schoolboy, with my parents, to stay at a very big country house, the kind of place to which I was little used, where the advent of a stately footman to take away my clothes in the morning used to fill me with misery. The first evening there was a big dinner-party. I found myself sitting next my delightful and kindly hostess, my father being on the other side of her. All went well till dessert, when an amiable, long-haired spaniel came to my side to beg of me. I had nothing but grapes on my plate, and purely out of compliment I offered him one. He at once took it in his mouth, and hurried to a fine white fur rug in front of the hearth, where he indulged in some unaccountable convulsions, rolling himself about and growling in an ecstasy of delight. My host, an irascible man, looked round, and then said: "Who the devil has given that dog a grape?" He added to my father, by way of explanation, "The fact is that if he can get hold of a grape, he rolls it on that rug, and it is no end of a nuisance to get the stain out." I sat crimson with

guilt, and was just about to falter out a confession, when my hostess looked up, and, seeing what had happened, said, "It was me, Frank—I forgot for the moment what I was doing." My gratitude for this angelic intervention was so great that I had not even the gallantry to own up, and could only repay my protectress with an intense and lasting devotion. I have no doubt that she explained matters afterwards to our host; and I contrived to murmur my thanks later in the evening. But the shock had been a terrible one, and taught me not only wisdom, but the Christian duty of intervening, if I could, to save the shy from their sins and sufferings.

> "Taught by the Power that pities me,
> I learn to pity them."

But the consideration that emerges from these reminiscences is the somewhat bewildering one, that shyness is a thing which seems to be punished, both by immediate discomfort and by subsequent fantastic remorse, far more heavily than infinitely more serious moral lapses. The repentance that follows sin can hardly be more poignant than the agonising sense of guilt which steals over the waking consciousness on the morning that follows some such social lapse. In fact it must be confessed that most of us dislike appearing fools far more than we dislike feeling knaves; so that one wonders whether one does not dread the ridicule and disapproval of society more than one dreads the sense of a lapse

from morality ; the philosophical outcome of which would seem to be that the verdict of society upon our actions is at the base of morality. We may feel assured that the result of moral lapses will ultimately be that we shall have to face the wrath of our Creator ; but one hopes that side by side with justice will be found a merciful allowance for the force of temptation. But the final judgment is in any case not imminent, while the result of a social lapse is that we have to continue to face a disapproving and even a contemptuous circle, who will remember our failure with malicious pleasure, and whose sense of justice will not be tempered by any appreciable degree of mercy. Here again is a discouraging circumstance, that when we call to mind some similarly compromising and grotesque adventure in the life of one of our friends, in spite of the fact that we well know the distress that the incident must have caused him, we still continue to hug, and even to repeat, our recollection of the occasion with a rich sense of joy. Is it that we do not really desire the peace and joy of others ? It would seem so. How many of us are not conscious of feeling extremely friendly and helpful when our friend is in sorrow, or difficulty, or discredit, and yet of having no taste for standing by and applauding when our friend is joyful and successful ! There is nothing, it seems, that we can render to our friend in the latter case, except the praise of which he has already had enough !

It seems then that the process of anatomising the nature and philosophy of shyness only ends in stripping off, one by one, as from an onion, the decent integuments of the human spirit, and revealing it every moment more and more in its native rankness. Let me forbear, consoling myself with the thought that the qualities of human beings are not meant to be taken up one by one, like coins from a tray, and scrutinised; but that what matters is the general effect, the blending, the grouping, the mellowed surface, the warped line. I was only yesterday in an old church, where I saw an ancient font-cover—a sort of carved extinguisher—and some dark panels of a rood-screen. They had been, both cover and panels, coarsely and brightly painted and gilt; and, horrible to reflect, it flashed upon me that they must have once been both glaring and vulgar. Yet to-day the dim richness of the effect, the dints, the scaling-off of the flakes, the fading of the pigment, the dulling of the gold, were incomparable; and I began to wonder if perhaps that was not what happened to us in life; and that though we foolishly regretted the tarnishing of the bright surfaces of soul and body with our passions and tempers and awkwardnesses and feeblenesses, yet perhaps it was, after all, that we were taking on an unsuspected beauty, and making ourselves fit, some far-off day, for the Communion of Saints!

IX

EQUALITY

IT is often said that the Anglo-Saxon races suffer from a lack of ideals, that they do not hold enough things sacred. But there is assuredly one thing which the most elementary and barbarous Anglo-Saxon holds sacred, beyond creed and Decalogue and fairplay and morality, and that is property. At inquests, for instance, it may be noted how often inquiries are solicitously made, not whether the deceased had religious difficulties or was disappointed in love, but whether he had any financial worries. We hold our own property to be very sacred indeed, and our respect for other men's rights in the matter is based on the fact that we wish our own rights to be respected. If I were asked what other ideals were held widely sacred in England and America I should find it very difficult to reply. I think that there is a good deal of interest taken in America in education and culture; whereas in England I do not believe that there is very much interest taken in either; almost the only thing which is valued in England, romantically, and with a kind of enthusiasm, besides

property, is social distinction ; the democracy in England is sometimes said to be indignant at the existence of so much social privilege ; the word "class" is said to be abhorrent to the democrat; but the only classes that he detests are the classes above him in the social scale, and the democrat is extremely indignant if he is assigned to a social station which he considers to be below his own. I have met democrats who despise and contemn the social tradition of the so-called upper classes, but I have never met a democrat who is not much more infuriated if it is supposed that he has not social traditions of his own vastly superior to the social traditions of the lowest grade of precarious mendicity. The reason why socialism has never had any great hold in England is because equality is only a word, and in no sense a real sentiment in England. The reason why members of the lowest class in England are not as a rule convinced socialists is because their one ambition is to become members of the middle-class, and to have property of their own ; and while the sense of personal possession is so strong as it is, no socialism worthy of the name has a chance. It is possible for any intelligent, virtuous, and capable member of the lower class to transfer himself to the middle-class ; and once there he does not favour any system of social equality. Socialism can never prevail as a political system, until we get a majority of disinterested men, who do not want to

purchase freedom from daily work by acquiring property, and who desire the responsibility rather than the influence of administrative office. But administrative office is looked upon in England as an important if indirect factor in acquiring status and personal property for oneself and one's friends.

I am myself a sincere believer in socialism; that is to say, I do not question the right of society to deprive me of my private property if it chooses to do so. It does choose to do so to a certain extent through the medium of the income-tax. Such property as I possess has, I think it as well to state, been entirely acquired by my own exertions. I have never inherited a penny, or received any money except what I have earned. I am quite willing to admit that my work was more highly paid than it deserved; but I shall continue to cling tenaciously to it until I am convinced that it will be applied for the benefit of every one; I should not think it just if it was taken from me for the benefit of the idle and incompetent; and I should be reluctant to part with it unless I felt sure that it would pass into the hands of those who are as just-minded and disinterested as myself, and be fairly administered. I should not think it just if it were taken from me by people who intended to misuse it, as I have misused it, for their own personal gratification.

It was made a matter of merriment in the case

of William Morris that he preached the doctrines of socialism while he was a prosperous manufacturer; but I see that he was perfectly consistent. There is no justice, for instance, about the principle of disarmament, unless all nations loyally disarm at the same time. A person cannot be called upon to strip himself of his personal property for disinterested reasons, if he feels that he is surrounded by people who would use the spoils for their own interest. The process must be carried out by a sincere majority, who may then coerce the selfish minority. I have no conception what I should do with my money if I determined that I ought not to possess it. It ought not to be applied to any public purpose, because under a socialist régime all public institutions would be supported by the public, and they ought not to depend upon private generosity. Still less do I think that it ought to be divided among individuals, because, if they were disinterested persons, they ought to refuse to accept it. The only good reason I should have for disencumbering myself of my possessions would be that I might set a good example of the simple life, by working hard for a livelihood, which is exactly what I do; and my only misfortune is that my earnings and the interest of my accumulated earnings produce a sum which is far larger than the average man ought to possess. Thus the difficulty is a very real one. Moreover the evil of personal property

is that it tends to emphasise class-distinctions and to give the possessors of it a sense of undue superiority. Now I am democratic enough to maintain that I have no sense whatever of personal superiority. I do not allow my possession of property to give me a life of vacuous amusement, for the simple reason that my work amuses me far more than any other form of occupation. If it is asked why I tend to live by preference among what may be called my social equals, I reply that the only people one is at ease with are the people whose social traditions are the same as one's own, for the simple reason that one does not then have to think about social traditions at all. I do not think my social traditions are better than the social traditions of any other stratum of society, whether it be described as above or below my own; all I would say is that they are different from the social traditions of other strata, and I much prefer to live without having to consider such matters at all. The manners of the upper middle-class to which scientifically I belong, are different from the manners of the upper, lower-middle, and lower class, and I feel out of my element in the upper class, just as I feel out of my element in the lower class. Of course if I were perfectly simple-minded and sincere, this would not be so; but, as it is, I am at ease with professional persons of my own standing; I understand their point-of-view without any need of explanation; in any

class but my own, I am aware of the constant strain of trying to grasp another point-of-view; and to speak frankly, it is not worth the trouble. I do not at all desire to migrate out of my own class, and I have never been able to sympathise with people who did. The motive for doing so is not generally a good one, though it is of course possible to conceive a high-minded aristocrat who from motives based upon our common humanity might desire to apprehend the point-of-view of an artisan, or a high-minded artisan who for the same motive desired to apprehend the point-of-view of an earl. But one requires to feel sure that this is based upon a strong sense of charity and responsibility, and I can only say that I have not found that the desire to migrate into a different class is generally based upon these qualities.

The question is, what ought a man who believes sincerely in the principle of equality to do in the matter, if he is situated as I am situated? What I admire and desire in life is friendly contact with my fellows, interesting work, leisure for following the pursuits I enjoy, such as art and literature. I honestly confess that I am not interested in what are called Social Problems, or rather I am not at all interested in the sort of people who study them. Such problems have hardly reached the vital stage; they are in the highly technical stage, and are mixed up with such things as political economy, politics, organisation, and so

forth, which, to be perfectly frank, are to me blighting and dreary objects of study. I honour profoundly the people who engage in such pursuits; but life is not long enough to take up work, however valuable, from a sense of duty, if one realises one's own unfitness for such labours. I wish with all my heart that all classes cared equally for the things which I love. I should like to be able to talk frankly and unaffectedly about books, and interesting people, and the beauties of nature, and abstract topics of a mild kind, with any one I happened to meet. But, as a rule, to speak frankly, I find that people of what I must call the lower class are not interested in these things; people in what I will call the upper class are faintly interested, in a horrible and condescending way, in them—which is worse than no interest at all. A good many people in my own class are impatient of them, and think of them as harmless recreations; I fall back upon a few like-minded friends, with whom I can talk easily and unreservedly of such things, without being thought priggish or donnish or dilettanteish or unintelligible. The subjects in which I find the majority of people interested are personal gossip, money, success, business, politics. I love personal gossip, but that can only be enjoyed in a circle well acquainted with each other's faults and foibles; and I do not sincerely care for talking about the other matters I have mentioned. Hitherto I have always had

a certain amount of educational responsibility, and that has furnished an abundance of material for pleasant talk and interesting thoughts; but then I have always suffered from the Anglo-Saxon failing of disliking responsibility except in the case of those for whom one's efforts are definitely pledged on strict business principles. I cannot deliberately assume a sense of responsibility towards people in general; to do that implies a sense of the value of one's own influence and example, which I have never possessed; and, indeed, I have always heartily disliked the manifestation of it in others. Indeed, I firmly believe that the best and most fruitful part of a man's influence, is the influence of which he is wholly unconscious; and I am quite sure that no one who has a strong sense of responsibility to the world in general can advance the cause of equality, because such a sense implies at all events a consciousness of moral superiority. Moreover, my educational experience leads me to believe that one cannot do much to form character. The most one can do is to guard the young against pernicious influences, and do one's best to recommend one's own disinterested enthusiasms. One cannot turn a violet into a rose by any horticultural effort; one can only see that the violet or the rose has the best chance of what is horribly called self-effectuation.

My own belief is that these great ideas like

Equality and Justice are things which, like poetry, are born and cannot be made. That a number of earnest people should be thinking about them shows that they are in the air; but the interest felt in them is the sign and not the cause of their increase. I believe that one must go forwards, trying to avoid anything that is consciously harsh or pompous or selfish or base, and the great ideas will take care of themselves.

The two great obvious difficulties which seem to me to lie at the root of all schemes for producing a system of social equality are first the radical inequality of character, temperament, and equipment in human beings. No system can ever hope to be a practical system unless we can eliminate the possibility of children being born, some of them perfectly qualified for life and citizenship, and others hopelessly disqualified. If such differences were the result of environment it would be a remediable thing. But one can have a strong, vigorous, naturally temperate child born and brought up under the meanest and most sordid conditions, and, on the other hand, a thoroughly worthless and detestable person may be the child of high-minded, well-educated people, with every social advantage. My work as a practical educationalist enforced this upon me. One would find a boy, born under circumstances as favourable for the production of virtue and energy as any socialistic system could provide, who was

really only fitted for the lowest kind of mechanical work, and whose instincts were utterly gross. Even if the State could practise a kind of refined Mendelism, it would be impossible to guard against the influences of heredity. If one traces back the hereditary influences of a child for ten generations, it will be found that he has upwards of two thousand progenitors, any one of whom may give him a bias.

And secondly, I cannot see that any system of socialism is consistent with the system of the family. The parents in a socialistic state can only be looked upon as brood stock, and the nurture of the rising generation must be committed to some State organisation, if one is to secure an equality of environing influences. Of course, this is done to a certain extent by the boarding-schools of the upper classes; and here again my experience has shown me that the system, though a good one for the majority, is not the best system invariably for types with marked originality—the very type that one most desires to propagate.

These are, of course, very crude and elementary objections to the socialistic scheme; all that I say is that until these difficulties seem more capable of solution, I cannot throw myself with any interest into the speculation; I cannot continue in the path of logical deduction, while the postulates and axioms remain so unsound.

What then can a man who has resources that he cannot wisely dispose of, and happiness that he cannot impart to others, but yet who would only too gladly share his gladness with the world, do to advance the cause of the general weal? Must he plunge into activities for which he has no aptitude or inclination, and which have as their aim objects for which he does not think that the world is ripe? Every one will remember the figure of Mrs. Pardiggle in *Bleak House*, that raw-boned lady who enjoyed hard work, and did not know what it was to be tired, who went about rating inefficient people, and "boned" her children's pocket-money for charitable objects. It seems to me that many of the people who work at social reforms do so because, like Mrs. Pardiggle, they enjoy hard work and love ordering other people about. In a society wisely and rationally organised, there would be no room for Mrs. Pardiggle at all; the question is whether things must first pass through the Pardiggle stage? I do not in my heart believe it. Mrs. Pardiggle seems to me to be not part of the cure of the disease, but rather one of the ugliest of its symptoms. I think that she is on the wrong tack altogether, and leading other people astray. I do know some would-be social reformers, whom I respect and commiserate with all my heart, who see what is amiss, and have no idea how to mend it, and who lose themselves, like Hamlet, in a sort

of hopeless melancholy about it all, with a deep-seated desire to give others a kind of happiness which they ought to desire, but which, as a matter of fact, they do not desire. Such men are often those upon whom early youth broke, like a fresh wave, with an incomparable sense of rapture, in the thought of all the beauty and loveliness of nature and art; and who lived for a little in a Paradise of delicious experiences and fine emotions, believing that there must be some strange mistake, and that every one must in reality desire what seemed so utterly desirable; and then, as life went on, there fell upon these the shadow of the harsh facts of life; the knowledge that the majority of the human race had no part or lot in such visions, but loved rather food and drink and comfort and money and rude mirth; who did not care a pin what happened to other people, or how frail and suffering beings spent their lives, so long as they themselves were healthy and jolly. Then that shadow deepens and thickens, until the sad dreamers do one of two things—either immure themselves in a tiny scented garden of their own, and try to drown the insistent noises without; or, on the other hand, if they are of the nobler sort, lose heart and hope, and even forfeit their own delight in things that are sweet and generous and pleasant and pure. A mournful and inextricable dilemma!

Perhaps one or two of such visionaries, who are made of sterner stuff, have deliberately em-

barked, hopefully and courageously, upon the Pardiggle path; they have tried absurd experiments, like Ruskin, in road-making and the formation of Guilds; they have taken to journalism and committees like William Morris. But they have been baffled. I do not mean to say that such lives of splendid renunciation may not have a deep moral effect; but, on the other hand, it is little gain to humanity if a richly-endowed spirit deserts a piece of work that he can do, to toil unsuccessfully at a piece of work that cannot yet be done at all.

I myself believe that when Society is capable of using property and the better pleasures, it will arise and take them quietly and firmly: and as for the fine spirits who would try to organise things before they are even sorted, well, they have done a noble, ineffectual thing, because they could not do otherwise; and their desire to mend what is amiss is at all events a sign that the impulse is there, that the sun has brightened upon the peaks before it could warm the valleys.

I was reading to-day *The Irrational Knot*, an early book by Mr. Bernard Shaw, whom I wholeheartedly admire because of his courage and good-humour and energy. That book represents a type of the New Man, such as I suppose Mr. Shaw would have us all to be; the book, in spite of its radiant wit, is a melancholy one, because the novelist penetrates so clearly past the dis-

guises of humanity, and takes delight in dragging the mean, ugly, shuddering, naked creature into the open. The New Man himself is entirely vigorous, cheerful, affectionate, sensible, and robust. He is afraid of nothing and shocked by nothing. I think it would have been better if he had been a little more shocked, not in a conventional way, but at the hideous lapses and failures of even generous and frank people. He is too hard and confident to be an apostle. He does not lead the flock like a shepherd, but helps them along, like Father-o'-Flynn, with his stick. I would have gone to Conolly, the hero of the book, to get me out of a difficulty, but I could not have confided to him what I really held sacred. Moreover the view of money, as the one essential world-force, so frankly confessed in the book, puzzled me. I do not think that money is ever more than a weapon in the hands of a man, or a convenient screening wall, and the New Man ought to have neither weapons nor walls, except his vigour and serenity of spirit. Again the New Man is too fond of saying what he thinks, and doing what he chooses; and, in the new earth, that independent instinct will surely be tempered by a sense, every bit as instinctive, of the rights of other people. But I suppose Mr. Shaw's point is that if you cannot mend the world, you had better make it serve you, as in its folly and debility it will, if you bully it enough. I suppose

that Mr. Shaw would say that the brutality of his hero is the shadow thrown on him by the vileness of the world, and that if we were all alike courageous and industrious and good-humoured, that shadow would disappear.

And this, I suppose, is after all the secret; that the world is not going to be mended from without, but is mending itself from within; and thus that the best kind of socialism is really the highest individualism, in which a man leaves legislation to follow and express, as it assuredly does, the growth of emotion, and sets himself, in his own corner, to be as quiet and disinterested and kindly as he can, choosing what is honest and pure, and rejecting what is base and vile; and this is after all the socialism of Christ; only we are all in such a hurry, and think it more effective to clap a ruffian into gaol than to suffer his violence—the result of which process is to make men sympathise with the ruffian—while, if we endure his violence, we touch a spring in the hearts of ruffian and spectators alike, which is more fruitful of good than the criminal's infuriated seclusion, and his just quarrel with the world. Of course the real way is that we should each of us abandon our own desires for private ease and convenience, in the light of the hope that those who come after will be easier and happier; whereas the Pardiggle reformer literally enjoys the presence of the refuse, because his broom has something to sweep away.

And the strangest thing of all is that we move forward, in a bewildered company, knowing that our every act and word is the resultant of ancient forces, not one of which we can change or modify in the least degree, while we live under the instinctive delusion, which survives the severest logic, that we can always and at every moment do to a certain extent what we choose to do. What the truth is that connects and underlies these two phenomena, we have not the least conception; but meanwhile each remains perfectly obvious and apparently true. To myself, the logical belief is infinitely the more hopeful and sustaining of the two; for if the movement of progress is in the hands of God, we are at all events taking our mysterious and wonderful part in a great dream that is being evolved, far more vast and amazing than we can comprehend; whereas if I felt that it was left to ourselves to choose, and that, hampered as we feel ourselves to be by innumerable chains of circumstance, we could yet indeed originate action and impede the underlying Will, I should relapse into despair before a problem full of sickening complexities and admitted failures. Meanwhile, I do what I am given to do; I perceive what I am allowed to perceive; I suffer what is appointed for me to suffer; but all with a hope that I may yet see the dawn break upon the sunlit sea, beyond the dark hills of time.

X

THE DRAMATIC SENSE

THE other day I was walking along a road at Cambridge, engulfed in a torrent of cloth-capped and coated young men all flowing one way—going to see or, as it is now called, to "watch" a match. We met a little girl walking with her governess in the opposite direction. There was a baleful light of intellect in the child's eye, and a preponderance of forehead combined with a certain lankness of hair betrayed, I fancy, an ingenuous academical origin. The girl was looking round her with an unholy sense of superiority, and as we passed she said to her governess in a clear-cut, complacent tone, "We're quite exceptional, aren't we?" To which the governess replied briskly, "Laura, don't be ridiculous!" To which exhortation Laura replied with self-satisfied pertinacity, "No, but we *are* exceptional, aren't we?"

Ah, Miss Laura, I thought to myself, you are one of those people with a dramatic sense of your own importance. It will probably make you very happy, and an absolutely insufferable person! I

have little doubt that the tiny prig was saying to herself, "I dare say that all these men are wondering who is the clever-looking little girl who is walking in the opposite direction to the match, and has probably something better to do than look on at matches." It is a great question whether one ought to wish people to nourish illusions about themselves, or whether one ought to desire such illusions to be dispelled. They certainly add immensely to people's happiness, but on the other hand, if life is an educative progress, and if the aim of human beings is or ought to be the attainment of moral perfection, then the sooner that these illusions are dispelled the better. It is one of the many questions which depend upon the great fact as to whether our identity is prolonged after death. If identity is not prolonged, then one would wish people to maintain every illusion which makes life happier; and there is certainly no illusion which brings people such supreme and unfailing contentment as the sense of their own significance in the world. This illusion rises superior to all failures and disappointments. It makes the smallest and simplest act seem momentous. The world for such persons is merely a theatre of gazers in which they discharge their part appropriately and successfully. I know several people who have the sense very strongly, who are conscious from morning till night, in all that they do or say, of

an admiring audience; and who, even if their circle is wholly indifferent, find food for delight in the consciousness of how skilfully and satisfactorily they discharge their duties. I remember once hearing a worthy clergyman, of no particular force, begin a speech at a missionary meeting by saying that people had often asked him what was the secret of his smile; and that he had always replied that he was unaware that his smile had any special quality; but that if it indeed was so, and it would be idle to pretend that a good many people had not noticed it, it was that he imported a resolute cheerfulness into all that he did. The man, as I have said, was not in any way distinguished, but there can be no doubt that the thought of his heavenly smile was a very sustaining one, and that the sense of responsibility that the possession of such a characteristic gave him, undoubtedly made him endeavour to smile like the Cheshire Cat, when he did not feel particularly cheerful.

It is not, however, common to find people make such a frank and candid confession of their superiority. The feeling is generally kept for more or less private consumption. The underlying self-satisfaction generally manifests itself, for instance, with people who have no real illusions, say, about their personal appearance, in leading them to feel, after a chance glance at themselves in a mirror, that they really do not look so bad in

certain lights. A dull preacher will repeat to himself, with a private relish, a sentence out of a very commonplace discourse of his own, and think that that was really an original thought, and that he gave it an impressive emphasis; or a student will make a very unimportant discovery, press it upon the attention of some great authority on the subject, extort a half-hearted assent, and will then go about saying, "I mentioned my discovery to Professor A——; he was quite excited about it, and urged the immediate publication of it." Or a commonplace woman will give a tea-party, and plume herself upon the *éclat* with which it went off. The materials are ready to hand in any life; the quality is not the same as priggishness, though it is closely akin to it; it no doubt exists in the minds of many really successful people, and if it is not flagrantly betrayed, it is often an important constituent of their success. But the happy part of it is that the dramatic sense is often freely bestowed upon the most inconspicuous and unintelligent persons, and fills their lives with a consciousness of romance and joy. It concerns itself mostly with public appearances, upon however minute a scale, and thus it is a rich source of consolation and self-congratulation. Even if it falls upon one who has no social gifts whatever, whose circle of friends tends to diminish as life goes on, whose invitations tend to decrease, it still frequently survives in a consciousness of being

profoundly interesting, and consoles itself by believing that under different circumstances and in a more perceptive society the fact would have received a wider recognition.

But, after all, as with many things, much depends upon the way that illusions are cherished. When this dramatic sense is bestowed upon a heavy-handed, imperceptive, egotistical person, it becomes a terrible affliction to other people, unless indeed the onlooker possesses the humorous spectatorial curiosity; when it becomes a matter of delight to find a person behaving characteristically, striking the hour punctually, and being, as Mr. Bennet thought of Mr. Collins, fully as absurd as one had hoped. It then becomes a pleasure, and not necessarily an unkind one, because it gives the deepest satisfaction to the victim, to tickle the egotist as one might tickle a trout, to draw him on by innocent questions, to induce him to unfold and wave his flag high in the air. I had once a worthy acquaintance whose occasional visits were to me a source of infinite pleasure—and I may add that I have no doubt that they gave him a pleasure quite as acute—because he only required the simplest fly to be dropped on the pool, when he came heavily to the top and swallowed it. I have heard him deplore the vast size of his correspondence, the endless claims made upon him for counsel. I have heard him say with a fatuous smile that there were literally hundreds of people

who day by day brought their pitcher of self-pity to be filled at his pump of sympathy: that he wished he could have a little rest, but that he supposed that it was a plain duty for him to minister thus to human needs, though it took it out of him terribly. I suppose that some sort of experience must have lain behind this confession, for my friend was a decidedly moral man, and would not tell a deliberate untruth; the only difficulty was that I could not conceive where he kept his stores of sympathy, because I had never heard him speak of any subject except himself, and I suppose that his method of consolation, if he was consulted, was to relate some striking instance out of his own experience in which grace triumphed over nature.

Sometimes, again, the dramatic sense takes the form of an exaggerated self-depreciation. I was reading the other day the life of a very devoted clergyman, who said on his death-bed to one standing by him, "If anything is done in memory of me, let a plain slab be placed on my grave with my initials and the date, and the words, 'the unworthy priest of this parish'—that must be all."

The man's modesty was absolutely sincere; yet what a strange confusion of modesty and vanity after all! If the humility had been *perfectly* unaffected, he would have felt that the man who really merited such a description deserved

no memorial at all; or again, if he had had no sense of credit, he would have left the choice of a memorial to any who might wish to commemorate him. If one analyses the feeling underneath the words, it will be seen to consist of a desire to be remembered, a hope almost amounting to a belief that his work was worthy of commemoration, coupled with a sincere desire not to exaggerate its value. And yet silence would have attested his humility far more effectually than any calculated speech!

The dramatic sense is not a thing which necessarily increases as life goes on; some people have it from the very beginning. I have an elderly friend who is engaged on a very special sort of scientific research of a wholly unimportant kind. He is just as incapable as my sympathetic friend of talking about anything except his own interests; "You don't mind my speaking about my work?" he says with a brilliant smile; "you see it means so much to me." And then, after explaining some highly technical detail, he will add: "Of course this seems to you very minute, but it is work that has got to be done by some one; it is only laying a little stone in the temple of science. Of course I often feel I should like to spread my wings and take a wider flight, but I do seem to have a special faculty for this kind of work, and I suppose it is my duty to stick to it." And he will pass his hand wearily over his brow, and expound another

technical detail. He apologises ceaselessly for dwelling on his own work; but in no place or company have I ever heard him do otherwise; and he is certainly one of the happiest people I know.

But, on the other hand, it is a rather charming quality to find in combination with a certain balance of mind. Unless a man is interesting to himself he cannot easily be interesting to others; there is a youthful and ingenuous sense of romance and drama which can exist side by side with both modesty and sympathy, somewhat akin to the habit common to imaginative children of telling themselves long stories in which they are the heroes of the tale. But people who have this faculty are generally mildly ashamed of it; they do not believe that their fantastic adventures are likely to happen. They only think how pleasant it would be if things arranged themselves so. It all depends whether such dramatisation is looked upon in the light of an amusement, or whether it is applied in a heavy-handed manner to real life. Imaginative children, who have true sympathy and affection as well, generally end by finding the real world, as they grow up into it, such an astonishing and interesting place, that their horizon extends, and they apply to other people, to their relationships and meetings, the zest and interest that they formerly applied only to themselves. The kind of temperament that falls a helpless

victim to dramatic egotism is generally the priggish and self-satisfied man, who has a fervent belief in his own influence, and the duty of exercising it on others. Most of us, one may say gratefully, are kept humble by our failures and even by our sins. If the path of the transgressor is hard, the path of the righteous man is often harder. If a man is born free from grosser temptations, vigorous, active, robust, the chances are ten to one that he falls into the snare of self-righteousness and moral complacency. He passes judgment on others, he compares himself favourably with them. A spice of unpopularity gives him a still more fatal bias, because he thinks that he is persecuted for his goodness, when he is only disliked for his superiority. He becomes content to warn people, and if they reject his advice and get into difficulties, he is not wholly ill-pleased. Whereas the diffident person, who tremblingly assumes the responsibility for some one else's life, is beset by miserable regrets if his penitent escapes him, and attributes it to his own mismanagement. The truth is that moral indignation is a luxury that very few people can afford to indulge in. And if it is true that a rich man can with difficulty enter the kingdom of heaven, it is also true that the dramatic man finds it still more difficult. He is impervious to criticism, because he bears it with meekness. He has so good a conscience that he cannot believe himself in the wrong. If he makes

an egregious blunder, he says to himself with infinite solemnity that it is right that his self-satisfaction should be tenderly purged away, and glories in his own humility. A far wholesomer frame of mind is that of the philosopher who said, when complimented on the mellowness that advancing years had brought him, that he still reserved to himself the right of damning things in general. Because the truth is that the things which really discipline us are the painful, dreary, intolerable things of life, the results of one's own meanness, stupidity, and weakness, or the black catastrophes which sometimes overwhelm us, and not the things which we piously and cheerfully accept as ministering to our consciousness of worth and virtue.

If I say that the dramatic failing is apt to be more common among the clergy than among ordinary mortals, it is because the clerical vocation is one that tempts men who have this temperament strongly developed to enter it, and afterwards provides a good deal of sustenance to the particular form of vanity that lies behind the temptation. The dramatic sense loves public appearances and trappings, processions and ceremonies. The instinctive dramatist, who is also a clergyman, tends to think of himself as moving to his place in the sanctuary in a solemn progress, with a worn spiritual aspect, robed as a son of Aaron. He likes to picture himself as standing in the pulpit pale with emotion, his eye gathering fire as he

bears witness to the truth or testifies against sin. He likes to believe that his words and intonations have a thrilling quality, a fire or a delicacy, as the case may be, which scorch or penetrate the sin-burdened heart. It may be thought that this criticism is unduly severe; I do not for a moment say that the attitude is universal, but it is commoner, I am sure, than one would like to believe; and neither do I say that it is inconsistent with deep earnestness and vital seriousness. I would go further, and maintain that such a dramatic consciousness is a valuable quality for men who have to sustain at all a spectacular part. It very often lends impressiveness to a man, and convinces those who hear and see him of his sincerity; while a man who thinks nothing of appearances often fails to convince his audience that he cares more for his message than for the fact that he is the mouthpiece of it. I find it very difficult to say whether it is well for people who cherish such illusions about their personal impressiveness to get rid of such illusions, when personal impressiveness is a real factor in their success. To do a thing really well it is essential to have a substantial confidence in one's aptitude for the task. And undoubtedly diffidence and humility, however sincere, are a bad outfit for a man in a public position. I am inclined to think that self-confidence, and a certain degree of self-satisfaction, are valuable assets, so long as a man believes primarily

in the importance of what he has to say and do, and only secondarily in his own power of, and fitness for, saying and doing it.

There is an interesting story—I do not vouch for the truth of it—that used to be told of Cardinal Manning, who undoubtedly had a strong sense of dramatic effect. He was putting on his robes one evening in the sacristy of the Cathedral at Westminster, when a noise was heard at the door, as of one who was determined on forcing an entrance in spite of the remonstrances of the attendants. In a moment a big, strongly-built person, looking like a prosperous man of business, labouring under a vehement and passionate emotion, came quickly in, looked about him, and advancing to Manning, poured out a series of indignant reproaches. "You have got hold of my boy," he said, "with your hypocritical and sneaking methods; you have made him a Roman Catholic; you have ruined the happiness and peace of our home; you have broken his mother's heart, and overwhelmed us in misery." He went on in this strain at some length. Manning, who was standing in his cassock, drew himself up in an attitude of majestic dignity, and waited until the intruder's eloquence had exhausted itself, and had ended with threatening gestures. Some of those present would have intervened, but Manning with an air of command waved them back, and then,

pointing his hand at the man, he said: "Now, sir, I have allowed you to have your say, and you shall hear me in reply. You have traduced Holy Church, you have broken in upon the Sanctuary, you have uttered vile and abominable slanders against the Faith; and I tell you," he added, pausing for an instant with flashing eyes and marble visage, "I tell you that within three months you will be a Catholic yourself." He then turned sharply on his heel and went on with his preparations. The man was utterly discomfited; he made as though he would speak, but was unable to find words; he looked round, and eventually slunk out of the sacristy in silence.

One of those present ventured to ask Manning afterwards about the strange scene. "Had the Cardinal," he inquired, "any sudden premonition that the man himself would adopt the Faith in so short a time?" Manning smiled indulgently, putting his hand on the other's shoulder, and said: "Ah, my dear friend, who shall say? You see, it was a very awkward moment, and I had to deal with the situation as I best could."

That was an instance of supreme presence of mind and great dramatic force; but one is not sure whether it was a wholly apostolical method of handling the position.

But to transfer the question from the ecclesiastical region into the region of common life, it

is undoubtedly true that if a man or a woman has a strong sense of moral issues, a deep feeling of responsibility and sympathy, an anxious desire to help things forward, then a dramatic sense of the value of manner, speech, gesture, and demeanour is a highly effective instrument. It is often said that people who wield a great personal influence have the gift of making the individual with whom they are dealing feel that his case is the most interesting and important with which they have ever come in contact, and of inspiring and maintaining a special kind of relationship between themselves and their petitioner. That is no doubt a very encouraging thing for the applicant to feel, even though he is sensible enough to realise that his case is only one among many with which his adviser is dealing, and probably not the most significant. Upon such a quality as this the success of statesmen, lawyers, physicians largely depends. But where the dramatic sense is combined with egotism, selfishness, and indifference to the claims of others, it is a terrible inheritance. It ministers, as I have said before, to its possessor's self-satisfaction; but on the other hand it is a failing which goes so deep and which permeates so intimately the whole moral nature, that its cure is almost impossible without the gift of what the Scripture calls "a new heart." Such self-complacency is a fearful shield against criti-

cism, and particularly so because it gives as a rule so few opportunities for any outside person, however intimate, to expose the obliquity of such a temperament. The dramatic egotist is careful as a rule not to let his egotism appear, but to profess to be, and even to believe that he is, guided by the highest motives in all his actions and words. A candid remonstrance is met by a calm tolerance, and by the reply that the critic does not understand the situation, and is trying to hinder rather than to help the development of beneficent designs.

I used to know a man of this type, who was insatiably greedy of influence and recognition. It is true that he was ready to help other people with money or advice. He was wealthy, and of a good position; and he would take a great deal of trouble to obtain appointments for friends who appealed to him, or to unravel a difficult situation; though the object of his diligence was not to help his applicants, but to obtain credit and power for himself. He did not desire that they should be helped, but that they should depend upon him for help. Nothing could undeceive him as to his own motive, because he gave his time and his money freely; yet the result was that most of the people whom he helped tended to resent it in the end, because he demanded services in return, and was jealous of any other interference. Chateaubriand says that it is not true gratitude to wish to repay

favours promptly; and still less is it true benevolence to wish to retain a hold over those whom one has benefited.

Sometimes indeed the two strains are almost inextricably intertwined, real and vital sympathy with others, combined with an overwhelming sense of personal significance; and then the problem is an inconceivably complicated one. For I suppose it must be frankly confessed that the basis of the dramatic sense is not a very wholesome one; it is, of course, a strong form of individualism. But while it is true that we suffer from taking ourselves too seriously, it is also possible to suffer from not taking ourselves seriously enough. If effectiveness is the end of life, there is no question that a strong sense of what we like to call responsibility, which is generally nothing more than a sense of one's own importance, decorously framed and glazed, is an immense factor in success. I myself cherish the heresy that effectiveness is very far from being the end of life, and that the only effectiveness that is worth anything is unintentional effectiveness. I believe that a man or woman who is humble and sincere, who loves and is loved, is higher on the steps of heaven than the adroitest lobbyist; but it may be that the world's criterion of what it admires and respects is the right one; and indeed it is hard to see how so strong an instinct is implanted in the human race, the instinct to value strength and success above everything, unless it

is put there by our Maker. At the same time one cherishes the hope that there is a better criterion somewhere, in the Divine Mind, in the fruitful future; the criterion that it is not what a man actually effects that matters, but what he makes of the resources that are given him to work with.

The effectiveness of the dramatic sense is beyond question. One can see a supreme instance of it in the case of the Christian Science movement, in which a woman of strong personality, by lighting upon an idea latent in a large number of minds, an idea moreover of real and practical vitality, and by putting it in a form which has all the definiteness required by brains of a hazy and emotional order, has contrived to effect an immense amount of good, besides amassing a colossal fortune, and assuming almost Divine pretensions, without being widely discredited. The human race is, speaking generally, so anxious for any leading that it can get, that if a man or woman can persuade themselves that they have a mission to humanity, and maintain a pontifical air, they will generally be able to attract a band of devoted adherents, whose faith, rising superior to both intelligence and common-sense, will endorse almost any claim that the prophet or prophetess likes to advance.

But the danger for the prophet himself is great. Arrogance, complacency, self-confidence, all the Pharisaical vices flourish briskly in such a soil.

He loses all sense of proportion, all sense of dependence. Instead of being a humble learner in a mysterious world, he expects to find everything made after the pattern revealed to him in the Mount. The good that he does may be permanent and fruitful; but in some dark valley of humiliation and despair he will have to learn that God tolerates us and uses us; He does not need us, "He delighteth not in any man's legs," as the Psalmist said with homely vigour. To save others and be oneself a castaway is the terrible fate of which St. Paul saw so clearly the possibility; and thus any one who is conscious of the dramatic sense, or even dimly suspects that it is there, ought to pray very humbly to be delivered from it, as he would from any other darling bosom-sin. He ought to eschew diplomacy and practise frankness, he ought to welcome failure and to rejoice when he makes humiliating mistakes. He ought to be grateful even for palpable faults and weaknesses and sins and physical disabilities. For if we have the hope that God is educating us, is moulding a fair statue out of the frail and sordid clay, such a faith forbids us to reject any experience, however disagreeable, however painful, however self-revealing it may be, as of no import; and thus we can grow into a truer sense of proportion, till at last we may come

"to learn that Man
Is small, and not forget that Man is great."

XI

KELMSCOTT AND WILLIAM MORRIS

I HAD been at Fairford that still, fresh, April morning, and had enjoyed the sunny little piazza, with its pretty characteristic varieties of pleasant stone-built houses, solid Georgian fronts interspersed with mullioned gables. But the church! That is a marvellous place; its massive lantern-tower, with solid, softly-moulded outlines—for the sandy oolite admits little fineness of detail—all weathered to a beautiful orange-grey tint, has a mild dignity of its own. Inside it is a treasure of mediævalism. The screens, the woodwork, the monuments, all rich, dignified, and spacious. And the glass! Next to King's College Chapel, I suppose, it is the noblest series of windows in England, and the colour of it is incomparable. Azure and crimson, green and orange, yet all with a firm economy of effect, the robes of the saints set and imbedded in a fine intricacy of white tabernacle-work. As to the design, I hardly knew whether to smile or weep. The splendid, ugly faces of the saints, depicted, whether designedly or artlessly, I cannot guess, as men of simple passions and

homely experience, moved me greatly, so unlike the mild, polite, porcelain visages of even the best modern glass. But the windows are as thick with demons as a hive with bees; and oh! the irresponsible levity displayed in these merry, grotesque, long-nosed creatures, some flame-coloured and long-tailed, some green and scaly, some plated like the armadillo, all going about their merciless work with infinite gusto and glee! Here one picked at the white breast of a languid, tortured woman who lay bathed in flame; one with a glowing hook thrust a lamentable big-paunched wretch down into a bath of molten liquor; one with pleased intentness turned the handle of a churn, from the top of which protruded the head of a fair-haired boy, all distorted with pain and terror. What could have been in the mind of the designer of these hateful scenes? It is impossible to acquit him of a strong sense of the humorous. Did he believe that such things were actually in progress in some infernal cavern, seven times heated? I fear it may have been so. And what of the effect upon the minds of the village folk who saw them day by day? It would have depressed, one would think, an imaginative girl or boy into madness, to dream of such things as being countenanced by God for the heathen and the unbaptized, as well as for the cruel and sinful. If the vile work had been represented as being done by cloudy, sombre, relentless creatures,

it would have been more tolerable. But these fantastic imps, as lively as grigs and full to the brim of wicked laughter, are certainly enjoying themselves with an extremity of delight of which no trace is to be seen in the mournful and heavily lined faces of the faithful. *Autres temps, autres mœurs!* Perhaps the simple, coarse mental palates of the village folk were none the worse for this realistic treatment of sin. One wonders what the saintly and refined Keble, who spent many years of his life as his father's curate here, thought of it all. Probably his submissive and deferential mind accepted it as in some ecclesiastical sense symbolical of the merciless hatred of God for the desperate corruption of humanity. It gave me little pleasure to connect the personality of Keble with the place, patient, sweet-natured, mystical, serviceable as he was. It seems hard to breathe in the austere air of a mind like Keble's, where the wind of the spirit blows chill down the narrow path, fenced in by the high, uncompromising walls of ecclesiastical tradition on the one hand, and stern Puritanism on the other. An artificial type, one is tempted to say!—and yet one ought never, I suppose, so to describe any flower that has blossomed fragrantly upon the human stock; any system that seems to extend a natural and instinctive appeal to certain definite classes of human temperament.

I sped pleasantly enough along the low, rich

pastures, thick with hedgerow elms, to Lechlade, another pretty town with an infinite variety of habitations. Here again is a fine ancient church with a comely spire, "a pretty pyramis of stone," as the old Itinerary says, overlooking a charming gabled house, among walled and terraced gardens, with stone balls on the corner-posts and a quaint pavilion, the river running below; and so on to a bridge over the yet slender Thames, where the river water spouted clear and fragrant into a wide pool; and across the flat meadows, bright with kingcups, the spire of Lechlade towered over the clustered house-roofs to the west.

Then further still by a lonely ill-laid road. And thus, with a mind pleasantly attuned to beauty and a quickening pulse, I drew near to Kelmscott. The great alluvial flat, broadening on either hand, with low wooded heights, "not ill-designed," as Morris said, to the south. Then came a winding cross-track, and presently I drew near to a straggling village, every house of which had some charm and quality of style, with here and there a high gabled dovecot, and its wooden cupola, standing up among solid barns and stacks. Here was a tiny and inconspicuous church, with a small stone belfry; and then the road pushed on, to die away among the fields. But there, at the very end of the village, stood the house of which we were in search; and it was with a touch of awe, with a quickening heart, that I drew near to a place of

such sweet and gracious memories, a place so dear to more than one of the heroes of art.

One comes to the goal of an artistic pilgrimage with a certain sacred terror; either the place is disappointing, or it is utterly unlike what one anticipates. I knew Kelmscott so well from Rossetti's letters, from Morris's own splendid and loving description, from pictures, from the tales of other pilgrims, that I felt I could not be disappointed; and I was not. It was not only just like what I had pictured it to be, but it had a delicate and natural grace of its own as well. The house was larger and more beautiful, the garden smaller and not less beautiful, than I had imagined. I had not thought it was so shy, so rustic a place. It is very difficult to get any clear view of the Manor. By the road are cottages, and a big building, half storehouse, half wheelwright's shop, to serve the homely needs of the farm. Through the open door one could see a bench with tools; and planks, staves, spokes, waggon-tilts, faggots, were all stacked in a pleasant confusion. Then came a walled kitchen-garden, with some big shrubs, bay and laurustinus, rising plumply within; beyond which the grey house, spread thin with plaster, held up its gables and chimneys over a stone-tiled roof. To the left, big barns and byres —a farm-man leading in a young bull with a pole at the nose-ring; beyond that, open fields, with a dyke and a flood-wall of earth, grown over with

nettles, withered sedges in the watercourse, and elms in which the rooks were clamorously building. We met with the ready, simple Berkshire courtesy; we were referred to a gardener who was in charge. To speak with him, we walked round to the other side of the house, to an open space of grass, where the fowls picked merrily, and the old farm-lumber, broken coops, disused ploughs, lay comfortably about. "How I love tidiness!" wrote Morris once. Yet I did not feel that he would have done other than love all this natural and simple litter of the busy farmstead.

Here the venerable house appeared more stately still. Through an open door in a wall we caught a sight of the old standards of an orchard, and borders with the spikes of spring-flowers pushing through the mould. The gardener was digging in the gravelly soil. He received us with a grave and kindly air; but when we asked if we could look into the house, he said, with a sturdy faithfulness, that his orders were that no one should see it, and continued his digging without heeding us further.

Somewhat abashed we retraced our steps; we got one glimpse of the fine indented front, with its shapely wings and projections. I should like to have seen the great parlour, and the tapestry-room with the story of Samson that bothered Rossetti so over his work. I should like to have

seen the big oak bed, with its hangings embroidered with one of Morris's sweetest lyrics:

> "The wind's on the wold,
> And the night is a-cold."

I should like to have seen the tapestry-chamber, and the room where Morris, who so frankly relished the healthy savour of meat and drink, ate his joyful meals, and the peacock yew-tree that he found in his days of failing strength too hard a task to clip. I should like to have seen all this, I say; and yet I am not sure that tables and chairs, upholsteries and pictures, would not have come in between me and the sacred spirit of the place.

So I turned to the church. Plain and homely as its exterior is, inside it is touched with the true mediæval spirit, like the "old febel chapel" of the *Mort d'Arthur*. Its bare walls, its half-obliterated frescoes, its sturdy pillars, gave it an ancient, simple air. But I did not, to my grief, see the grave of Morris, though I saw in fancy the coffin brought from Lechlade in the bright farm-waggon, on that day of pitiless rain. For there was going on in the churchyard the only thing I saw that day that seemed to me to strike a false note; a silly posing of village girls, self-conscious and over-dressed, before the camera of a photographer—a playing at æsthetics, bringing into the village life a touch of unwholesome vanity and the vulgar affectation of the world. That is the ugly shadow

of fame; it makes conventional people curious about the details of a great man's life and surroundings, without initiating them into any sympathy with his ideals and motives. The price that the real worshippers pay for their inspiration is the slavering idolatry of the unintelligent; and I withdrew in a mournful wonder from the place, wishing I could set an invisible fence round the scene, a fence which none should pass but the few who had the secret and the key in their hearts.

And here, for the pleasure of copying the sweet words, let me transcribe a few sentences from Morris's own description of the house itself:

"A house that I love with a reasonable love, I think; for though my words may give you no idea of any special charm about it, yet I assure you that the charm is there; so much has the old house grown up out of the soil and the lives of those that lived on it: some thin thread of tradition, a half-anxious sense of the delight of meadow and acre and wood and river; a certain amount (not too much, let us hope) of common-sense, a liking for making materials serve one's turn, and perhaps at bottom some little grain of sentiment—this, I think, was what went to the making of the old house."

And again:

"My feet moved along the road they knew. The raised way led us into a little field, bounded by a backwater of the river on one side; on the

right hand we could see a cluster of small houses and barns, and before us a grey stone barn and a wall partly overgrown with ivy, over which a few grey gables showed. The village road ended in the shallow of the backwater. We crossed the road, and my hand raised the latch of a door in the wall, and we stood presently on a stone path which led up to the old house. The garden between the wall and the house was redolent of the June flowers, and the roses were rolling over one another with that delicious superabundance of small well-tended gardens which at first sight takes away all thought save that of beauty. The blackbirds were singing their loudest, the doves were cooing on the roof-ridge, the rooks in the high elm trees beyond were garrulous among the young leaves, and the swifts wheeled whirring about the gables. And the house itself was a fit guardian for all the beauty of this heart of summer.

"O me! O me! How I love the earth, and the seasons, and weather, and all things that deal with it, and all that grows out of it—as this has done! The earth and the growth of it and the life of it! If I could but say or show how I love it!"

The pure lyrical beauty of these passages makes one out of conceit with one's own clumsy sentences. But still, I will say how all that afternoon, among the quiet fields, with the white clouds rolling up over the lip of the wolds, I was haunted

with the thought of that burly figure; the great head with its curly hair and beard; the eyes that seemed so guarded and unobservant, and that yet saw and noted every smallest detail; the big clumsy hands, apt for such delicacy of work; to see him in his rough blue suit, his easy rolling gait, wandering about, stooping to look at the flowers in the beds, or glancing up at the sky, or sauntering off to fish in the stream, or writing swiftly in the parlour, or working at his loom; so bluff, so kindly, so blunt in address, so unaffected, loving all that he saw, the tide of full-blooded and restless life running so vigorously in his veins; or, further back, Rossetti, with his wide eyes, half bright, half languorous, pale, haunted with impossible dreams, pacing, rapt in feverish thought, through the lonely fields. The ghosts of heroes! And whether it was that my own memories and affections and visions stirred my brain, or that some tide of the spirit still sets from the undiscovered shores to the scenes of life and love, I know not, but the place seemed thronged with unseen presences and viewless mysteries of hope. Doubtless, loving as we do the precise forms of earthly beauty, the wide green pastures, the tender grace of age on gable and wall, the springing of sweet flowers, the clear gush of the stream, we are really in love with some deeper and holier thing; yet even about the symbols themselves there lingers a consecrating power; and that influence

was present with me to-day, as I went homewards in the westering light, with the shadows of house and tree lengthening across the grass in the still afternoon.

Heroes, I said? Well, I will not here speak of Rossetti, though his impassioned heart and wayward dreams were made holy, I think, through suffering: he has purged his fault. But I cannot deny the name of hero to Morris. Let me put into words what was happening to him at the very time at which he had made this sweet place his home. He had already done as much in those early years as many men do in a lifetime. He had written great poems, he had loved and wedded, he had made abundant friends, his wealth was growing fast; he loved every detail of his work, designing, weaving, dyeing; he had a band of devoted workers and craftsmen under him. He could defy the world; he cared nothing at all for society or honours. He had magnificent vitality, a physique which afforded him every kind of wholesome momentary enjoyment.

In the middle of all this happy activity a cloud came over his mind, blotting out the sunshine. Partly, perhaps, private sorrows had something to do with it; partly, perhaps, a weakening of physical fibre, after a life of enormous productivity and restless energy, made itself felt. But these were only incidental causes. What began to weigh upon him was the thought of all the toiling

thousands of humanity, whose lives of labour precluded them from the enjoyment of all or nearly all of the beautiful things that were to him the very essence of life; and, what was worse still, he perceived that the very faculty of higher enjoyment was lacking, the instinct for beauty having been atrophied and almost eradicated by sad inheritance. He saw that not only did the workers not feel the joyful love of art and natural beauty, but that they could not have enjoyed such pleasures, even if they were to be brought near to them; and then came the further and darker thought, that modern art was, after all, a hollow and a soulless thing. He saw around him beautiful old houses like his own, old churches which spoke of a high natural instinct for fineness of form and detail. These things seemed to stand for a widespread and lively joy in simple beauty which seemed to have vanished out of the world. In ancient times it was natural to the old builders if they had, say, a barn to build, to make it strong and seemly and graceful; to buttress it with stone, to bestow care and thought upon coign and window-ledge and dripstone, to prop the roof on firm and shapely beams, and to cover it with honest stone tiles, each one of which had an individuality of its own. But now he saw that if people built naturally, they ran up flimsy walls of brick, tied them together with iron rods, and put a curved roof of galvanised iron on the top. It was bad

enough that it should be built so, but what was worse still was that no one saw or heeded the difference; they thought the new style was more convenient, and the question of beauty never entered their minds at all. They remorselessly pulled down, or patched meanly and sordidly, the old work. And thus he began to feel that modern art was an essentially artificial thing, a luxury existing for a few leisurely people, and no longer based on a deep universal instinct. He thought that art was wounded to death by competition and hurry and vulgarity and materialism, and that it must die down altogether before a sweet natural product could arise from the stump.

Then, too, Morris was not an individualist; he cared, one may think, about things more than people. A friend of his once complained that, if he were to die, Morris would no doubt grieve for him and even miss him, but that it would make no gap in his life, nor interrupt his energy of work. He cared for movements, for classes, for groups of men, more than he cared for persons. And thus the idea came to him, in a mournful year of reflection, that it was not only a mistake, but of the nature of sin, to isolate himself in a little Paradise of art of his own making, and to allow the great noisy, ugly, bewildered world to go on its way. It was a noble grief. The thought of the bare, uncheered, hopeless lives of the poor came to weigh on him like an obsession, and he

began to turn over in his mind what he could do to unravel the knotted skein.

"I am rather in a discouraged mood," he wrote on New Year's Day 1880, "and the whole thing seems almost too tangled to see through and too heavy to move." And again:

"I have of late been somewhat melancholy (rather too strong a word, but I don't know another); not so much so as not to enjoy life in a way, but just so much as a man of middle age who has met with rubs (though less than his share of them) may sometimes be allowed to be. When one is just so much subdued one is apt to turn more specially from thinking of one's own affairs to more worthy matters; and my mind is very full of the great change which I hope is slowly coming over the world."

And so he plunged into Socialism. He gave up his poetry and much of his congenial work. He attended meetings and committees; he wrote leaflets and pamphlets; he lavished money; he took to giving lectures and addresses; he exposed himself to misunderstandings and insults. He spoke in rain at street corners to indifferent loungers; he pushed a little cart about the squares selling Socialist literature; he had collisions with the police; he was summoned before magistrates: the "poetic upholsterer," as he was called, became an object of bewildered contempt to friends and foes alike. The work was not congenial to him,

but he did it well, developing infinite tolerance and good-humour, and even tactfulness, in his relations with other men. The exposure to the weather, the strain, the neglect of his own physical needs, brought on, undoubtedly, the illness of which he eventually died; and worst of all was the growing shadow of discouragement, which made him gradually aware that the times were not ripe, and that even if the people could seize the power they desired, they could not use it. He became aware that the worker's idea of rising in the social scale was not the idea of gaining security, leisure, independence, and love of honest work, but the hope of migrating to the middle class, and becoming a capitalist on a small scale. That was the last thing that Morris desired. Most of all he felt the charge of inconsistency that was dinned into his ears. It was held ridiculous that a wealthy capitalist and a large employer of labour, living, if not in luxury, at least in considerable stateliness, should profess Socialist ideas without attempting to disencumber himself of his wealth. He wrote in answer to a loving remonstrance:

"You see, my dear, I can't help it. The ideas which have taken hold of me will not let me rest; nor can I see anything else worth thinking of. How can it be otherwise, when to me society, which to many seems an orderly arrangement for allowing decent people to get through their lives creditably and with some pleasure, seems mere

cannibalism; nay, worse (for there ought to be hope in that), is grown so corrupt, so steeped in hypocrisy and lies, that one turns from one stratum of it to another with hopeless loathing. . . . Meantime, what a little ruffles me is this, that if I do a little fail in my duty some of my friends will praise me for failing instead of blaming me."

And then at last, after every sordid circumstance of intrigue and squabble and jealousy, one after another of the organisations he joined broke down. Half gratefully and half mournfully he disengaged himself, not because he did not believe in his principles, but because he saw that the difficulties were insuperable. He came back to the old life; he flung himself with renewed ardour into art and craftsmanship. He began to write the beautiful and romantic prose tales, with their enchanting titles, which are, perhaps, his most characteristic work. He learnt by slow degress that a clean sweep of an evil system cannot be made in a period or a lifetime by an individual, however serious or strenuous he may be; he began to perceive that, if society is to put ideas in practice, the ideas must first be there, clearly defined and widely apprehended; and that it is useless to urge men to a life of which they have no conception and for which they have no desire. He had always held it to be a sacred duty for people to live, if possible, in whatever simplicity, among beautiful things; and it may be said that no one man in one

generation has ever effected so much in this direction. He has, indeed, leavened and educated taste; he has destroyed a vile and hypocritical tradition of domestic art; by his writings he has opened a door for countless minds into a remote and fragrant region of unspoilt romance; and, still more than this, he remains an example of one who made a great and triumphant resignation of all that he held most dear, for the sake of doing what he thought to be right. He was not an ascetic, giving up what is half an incumbrance and half a terror; nor was he naturally a melancholy and detached person; but he gave up work which he loved passionately, and a life which he lived in a full-blooded, generous way, that he might try to share his blessings with others, out of a supreme pity for those less richly endowed than himself.

How, then, should not this corner of the world, which he loved so dearly, speak to the spirit with a voice and an accent far louder and more urgent than its own tranquil habit of sunny peace and green-shaded sweetness! "You know my faith," wrote Morris from Kelmscott in a bewildered hour, "and how I feel I have no sort of right to revenge myself for any of my private troubles on the kind earth; and here I feel her kindness very specially, and am bound not to meet it with a long face." Noble and high-hearted words! for he of all men seemed made by nature to enjoy security and

beauty and the joys of living, if ever man was so made. His very lack of personal sensitiveness, his unaptness to be moved by the pathetic appeal of the individual, might have been made a shield for his own peace; but he laid that shield down, and bared his breast to the sharp arrows; and in his noble madness to redress the wrongs of the world he was, perhaps, more like one of his great generous knights than he himself ever suspected.

This, then, I think is the reason why this place —a grey grange at the end of a country lane, among water meadows—has so ample a call for the spirit. A place of which Morris wrote, "The scale of everything of the smallest, but so sweet, so unusual even; it was like the background of an innocent fairy-story." Yes, it might have been that! Many of the simplest and quietest of lives had been lived there, no doubt, before Morris came that way. But with him came a realisation of its virtues, a perception that in its smallness and sweetness it yet held imprisoned, like the gem that sits on the smallest finger of a hand, an ocean of light and colour. The two things that lend strength to life are, in the first place, an appreciation of its quality, a perception of its intense and awful significance—the thought that we here hold in our hands, if we could but piece it all together, the elements and portions of a mighty, an overwhelming problem. The fragments of that mighty mystery are sorrow, sin, suffering, joy, hope, life,

death. Things of their nature sharply opposed, and yet that are, doubtless, somehow and somewhere, united and composed and reconciled. It is at this sad point that many men and most artists stop short. They see what they love and desire; they emphasise this and rest upon it; and when the surge of suffering buffets them away, they drown, bewildered, struggling for breath, complaining.

But for the true man it is otherwise. He is penetrated with the desire that all should share his joy and be emboldened by it. It casts a cold shadow over the sunshine, it mars the scent of the roses, it wails across the cooing of the doves—the sense that others suffer and toil unhelped; and still more grievous to him is the thought that, were these duller natures set free from the galling yoke, their mirth would be evil and hideous, they would have no inkling of the sweeter and the purer joy. And then, if he be wise, he tries his hardest, in slow and wearied hours, to comfort, to interpret, to explain; in much heaviness and dejection he labours, while all the time, though he knows it not, the sweet ripple of his thoughts spreads across the stagnant pool. He may be flouted, contemned, insulted, but he heeds it not; while all the strands of the great mystery, dark and bright alike, work themselves, delicately and surely, into the picture of his life, and the picture of other lives as well. Larger and richer grows

the great design, till it is set in some wide hall or corridor of the House of Life; and the figure of the toil-worn knight, with armour dinted and brow dimmed with dust and sweat, kneeling at the shrine, makes the very silence of the place beautiful; while those that go to and fro rejoice, not in the suffering and weariness, not in the worn face and the thin, sun-browned hands, but in the thought that he loved all things well; that his joy was pure and high, that his clear eyes pierced the dull mist that wreathed cold field and dripping wood, and that, when he sank, outworn and languid after the day's long toil, the jocund trumpets broke out from the high-walled town in a triumphant concert, because he had done worthily, and should now see greater things than these.

LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

XII

A SPEECH-DAY

IN the course of the summer it was my lot to attend the Speech-Day festivities of a certain school—indeed, I attended at more than one such gathering, *vocatus atque non vocatus*, as Horace says. They are not the sort of entertainments I should choose for pleasure; one feels too much like a sheep, driven from pen to pen, kindly and courteously driven, but still driven. One is fed rather than eats. One meets a number of charming and interesting people, and one has no time to talk to them. But I am always glad to have gone, and one carries away pleasant memories of kindness and courtesy, of youth and hope.

This particular occasion was so very typical that I am going to try and gather up my impressions and ideas. It was an old school and a famous school, though not one of the most famous. The buildings large and effective, full of modern and up-to-date improvements, with a mellow core of antiquity, in the shape of a venerable little court-yard in the centre. There were green lawns and pleasant gardens and umbrageous trees; and it

was a beautiful day, too, sunny and fresh, so that one was neither baked nor boiled. The first item was a luncheon, at which I sate between two very pleasant strangers and exchanged cautious views on education. We agreed that the value of the classics as a staple of mental training was perhaps a little overrated, and that possibly too much attention was nowadays given to athletics; but that after all the public-school system was the backbone of the country, and taught boys how to behave like gentlemen, and how to govern subject races. We agreed that they were ideal training-grounds for character, and that our public-schools were the envy of the civilised world. In such profound and suggestive interchange of ideas the time sped rapidly away.

Then we were gathered into a big hall. It was pleasant to see proud parents and charming sisters, wearing their best, clustered excitedly round some sturdy and well-brushed young hero, the hope of the race; pleasant to see frock-coated masters, beaming with professional benevolence, elderly gentlemen smilingly recalling tales of youthful prowess, which had grown quite epical in the lapse of time; it was inspiriting to feel one of a big company of people, all bent on being for once as good-humoured and cheerful as possible, and all inspired by a vague desire to improve the occasion.

The prizes were given away to the accompani-

ment of a rolling thunder of applause; we had familiar and ingenuous recitations from youthful orators, who desired friends, Romans, and countrymen to lend them their ears, or accepted the atrocious accusation of being a young man; and then a Bishop, who had been a schoolmaster himself, delivered an address. It was delightful to see and hear the good man expatiate. I did not believe much in what he said, nor could I reasonably endorse many of his statements; but he did it all so genially and naturally that one felt almost ashamed to question the matter of his discourse. Yet I could not help wondering why it is thought advisable always to say exactly the same things on these occasions. The good man began by asserting that the boys would never be so happy or so important again in their lives as they were at school, and that all grown-up people were envying them. I don't know whether any one believed that; I am sure the boys did not, if I can judge by what my own feelings used to be on such occasions. Personally I used to think my school a very decent sort of place, but I looked forward with excitement and interest to the liberty and life of the larger world; and though perhaps in a way we elders envied the boys for having the chances before them that we had so many of us neglected to seize, I don't suppose that with the parable of *Vice Versâ* before us we would really have changed places with them. Would any one ever return

willingly to discipline and barrack-life? Would any one under discipline refuse independence if it were offered him on easy terms? I doubt it!

Then the Bishop went on to talk about educational things; and he said with much emphasis that in spite of all that was said about modern education, we most of us realised as we grew older that all culture was really based upon the Greek and Latin classics. We all stamped on the ground and cheered at that, I as lustily as the rest, though I am quite sure it is not true. All that the Bishop really meant was that such culture as he himself possessed had been based on the classics. Now the Bishop is a robust, genial, and sensible man, but he is not a strictly cultured man. He is only sketchily varnished with culture. He thinks that German literature is nebulous, and French literature immoral. I don't suppose he ever reads an English book, except perhaps an ecclesiastical biography; he would say that he had no time to read a novel; probably he glances at the *Christian Year* on Sundays, and peruses a Waverley novel if he is kept in bed by a cold. Yet he considers himself, and would be generally considered, a well-educated man. I believe myself that the reason why we as a nation love good literature so little is because we are starved at an impressionable age on a diet of classics; and to persist in regarding the classics as the high-water mark of the human intellect seems to me to argue a melan-

choly want of faith in the progress of the race. However, for the moment we all believed ourselves to be men of a high culture, soundly based on the corner-stone of Latin and Greek. Then the Bishop went on to speak of athletics with a solemn earnestness, and he said, with deep conviction, that experience had taught him that whatever was worth doing was worth doing well. He did not argue the point as to whether all games were worth playing, or whether by filling up all the spare time of boys with them, by crowning successful athletes with glory and worship, by engaging masters who will talk with profound seriousness about bowling and batting, rowing and football, one might not be developing a perfectly false sense of proportion. He told the boys to play games with all their might, and he left on their minds the impression that athletics were certainly things to be ranked among the Christian graces. Of course he sincerely believed in them himself. He would have maintained that they developed manliness and vigour, and discouraged loafing and uncleanness. I am not at all sure myself that games as at present organised do minister directly to virtue. The popularity of the athlete is a dangerous thing if he is not virtuously inclined; while the excessive organisation of games discourages individuality, and emphasises a very false standard of success in the minds of many boys. But the Bishop was not invited that he might say unconventional

things. He was asked on purpose to bless things as they were, and he blessed them with all his might.

Then he went on to say that the real point after all was character and conduct; that intellect was a gift of God, and that conspicuous athletic capacity was a gift—he did not like to say of God, so he said of Providence; but that in one respect we were all equal, and that was in our capacity for moral effort; and that the boy who came to the front was not always the distinguished scholar or the famous athlete, but the industrious, trustworthy, kindly, generous, public-spirited boy. This he said with deep emotion, as though it were rather a daring and unexpected statement, but discerned by a vigilant candour; and all this with the air that he was testifying faithfully to the true values of life, and sweeping aside with a courageous hand the false glow and glamour of the world. We did not like to applaud at this, but we made a subdued drumming with our heels, and uttered a sort of murmurous assent to a noble and far from obvious proposition.

But here again I felt that the thing was somehow not quite as high-minded as it seemed. The goal designated was, after all, the goal of success. It was not suggested that the unrewarded and self-denying life was perhaps the noblest. The point was to come to the front somehow, and it was only indicating a sort of waiting game for the

boys who were conscious neither of intellectual nor athletic capacity. It was a sort of false socialism, this pretence of moral equality, a kind of consolation prize that was thus emphasised. And I felt that here again the assumption was an untrue one. That is the worst of life, if one examines it closely, that it is by no means wholly run on moral lines. It is strength that is rewarded, rather than good desires. The Bishop seemed to have forgotten the ancient maxim that prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament, and affliction the blessing of the New. These qualities that were going to produce ultimate success—conscientiousness, generosity, modesty, public spirit—they are, after all, as much gifts as any other gifts of intellect and bodily skill. How often has one seen boys who are immodest, idle, frivolous, mean-spirited, and ungenerous attain to the opposite virtues? Not often, I confess. Who does not know of abundant instances of boys who have been selfish, worthless, grasping, unprincipled, who have yet achieved success intellectually and athletically, and have also done well for themselves, amassed money, and obtained positions for themselves in after life. Looking back on my own school days, I cannot honestly say that the prizes of life have fallen to the pure-minded, affectionate, high-principled boys. The boys I remember who have achieved conspicuous success in the world have been hard-hearted, prudent, honourable char-

acters with a certain superficial *bonhomie*, who by a natural instinct did the things that paid. Stripped of its rhetoric, the Bishop's address resolved itself into a panegyric of success, and the morality of it was that if you could not achieve intellectual and athletic prominence, you might get a certain degree of credit by unostentatious virtue. What I felt was that somehow the goal proposed was—dare I hint it?—a vulgar one; that it was a glorification of prudence and good-humoured self-interest; and yet if the Bishop had preached the gospel of disinterestedness and quiet faithfulness and devotion, he would have had few enthusiastic hearers. If he had said that an awkward and surly manner, no matter what virtues it concealed, was the greatest bar to ultimate mundane success, it would have been quite true, though perhaps not particularly edifying. But what I desired was not startling paradox or cynical comment, but something more really manly, more just, more unconventional, more ardent, more disinterested. The boys were not exhorted to care for beautiful things for the sake of their beauty; but to care for attractive things for the sake of their acceptability.

And yet in a way it did us all good to listen to the great man. He was so big and kindly and fatherly and ingenuous; he had made virtue pay; I do not suppose he had ever had a low or an impure or a spiteful thought; but his path had been easy from the first; he was a scholar and an

athlete, and he had never pursued success, for the simple reason that it had fallen from heaven like manna round about his dwelling, with perhaps a few dozen quails as well! Boys, parents, masters, young and old alike, were assembled that day to worship success, and the Bishop prophesied good concerning them. It entered no one's head that success, in its simplest analysis, means thrusting some one else aside from a place which he desires to fill. But why on such a day should one think of the feelings of others? we were all bent on virtuously gratifying our own desires. The boys who were left out were the weak and the timid, the ailing and the erring, the awkward and the unpopular, the clumsy and the stupid; they were not bidden to take courage, they were rather bidden to envy the unattainable, and to submit with such grace as they could muster. But we pushed all such vague and unsatisfactory thoughts in the background; we sounded the clarion and filled the fife, and were at ease in Zion, while we worshipped the great, brave, glittering world.

What I desired was that, in the height of our jubilant self-gratulation, some sweet and gracious figure, full of heavenly wisdom, could have twitched the gaudy curtain aside for a moment and shown us other things than these; who could have assured us that we all, however stupid and dreary and awkward and indolent, however vexed with low dreams and ugly temp-

tations, yet had our share and place in the rich inheritance of life; and that even if it was to be all a record of dull failure, commonplace sinfulness, cheered by no joyful triumph, no friendly smile—yet if we fought the fault and did the dull task faithfully, and desired to be but a little better, a little stronger, a little more unselfish, that the pilgrimage with all its sandy tracts and terrifying spectres would not be traversed in vain; and then I think we might have been brought together with a sense of sweeter and truer unity, and might have thought of life as a thing to be shared, and joy as a thing to be lavished, and not have rather conceived of the world as a place full of fine things, of which we were all to gather sedulously as many as we could grasp and retain.

Or even if the good Bishop had taken a simpler line and told the boys some old story, like the story of Polycrates of Samos, I should have been more comfortable. Polycrates was the tyrant with whom everything went well that he set his hand to, so that to avoid the punishment of undue prosperity he threw his great signet-ring into the sea; but when he was served a day or two later with a slice of fish at his banquet, there was the ring sticking in its ribs. The Bishop might have said that this should teach us not to try and seize all the good things we could, and that the reason of it was not, as the old Greeks thought, that the gods envied the prosperity of mortals, but that

our prosperity was often dashed very wisely and tenderly from our lips, because one of the worst foes that a man can have, one of the most blinding and bewildering of faults, is the sense of self-sufficiency and security. That would not have spoilt the pleasure of those brisk boys, but would have given them something wholesome to take away and think about, like the prophet's roll that was sweet in the mouth and bitter in the belly.

It may be thought that I have thus dilated on the Bishop's address for the sole purpose of showing what a much better address I could have made. That is not the case at all. I could not have done the thing at all to start with, and, given both the nerve and the presence and the practice of the man, I could not have done it a quarter as well, because he was in tune with his audience and I should not have been. That was to me part of the tragedy. The Bishop's voice fell heavily and steadily, like a stream of water from a great iron pipe that fills a reservoir. The audience, too, were all in the most elementary mood. Boys of course frankly desire success without any disguise. And parents less frankly but no less hungrily, in an almost tigerish way, desire it for their children. The intensity of belief felt by a parent in a stupid or even vicious boy would be one of the most pathetic things I know, if it were not also one of the primal forces of the world.

And thus the tide being high the Bishop went

into harbour at the top of the flood. I don't even complain of the nature of the address; it was frankly worldly, such as might have been given by a Sadducee in the time of Christ. But the interesting thing about it was that most of the people present believed it to be an ethical and even a religious address. It was the ethic of a professional bowler and the religion of a banker. If a boy had been for all intents and purposes a professional bowler to the age of twenty-three, and a professional banker afterwards, he would almost exactly have fulfilled the Bishop's ideal. I do not think it is a bad ideal either. I only say that it is not an exalted ideal, and it is not a Christian ideal. It is the world in disguise, the wolf in sheep's clothing over again. We were taken in. We said to ourselves, "This is an animal certainly clothed as a sheep—and we must remember the old proverb and be careful." But as the Bishop's address proceeded, and the fragrant oil fell down to the skirt's of our clothing, we said, "There is certainly a sheep inside."

Then a choir of strong, rough, boyish voices sang an old glee or two—"Glorious Apollo" and "Hail smiling Morn," and a school song about the old place that made some of us bite our lips and furtively brush away an unexpected and inexplicable moisture from our eyes, at the thought of the fine fellows we had ourselves sat side by side with thirty and forty years ago, now scattered

to all ends of the earth, and some of them gone from the here to the everywhere, as the poet says. And then we adjourned to see the School Corps inspected—such solemn little soldiers, marching past in their serviceable uniforms, the line rising and falling with the inequalities of the ground, and bowing out a good deal in the centre, at the very moment that the good-natured old Colonel was careful to look the other way. Then there was a leisurely game of cricket, with a lot of very old boys playing with really amazing agility; and then I fell in with an old acquaintance, and we strolled about together, and got a friendly master to show us over the schoolrooms and one of the houses, and admired the excellent arrangements, and peeped into some studies crowded with pleasant boyish litter, and talked to some of the boys with an attempt at light juvenility, and enjoyed ourselves in a thoroughly absurd and leisurely fashion. And then I was left alone, and walking about, abandoned myself to sentiment pure and simple; it was hard to analyse that feeling which was stirred by the sight of all those fresh-faced boys, flowing like a stream through the old buildings, and just leaving their own little mark, for good or evil, on the place—a painted name on an Honours board, initials cut in desk or panel, a memory or two, how soon to grow dim in the minds of the new generation, who would be so full of themselves and of the present,

turning the sweet-scented manuscript of youth with such eager fingers, that they could give but little thought to the future and none at all to the past. And then one remembered, with a curious sense of wistful pain, how rapidly the cards of life were being dealt out to one, and how long it was since one had played the card of youth so heedlessly and joyfully away; that at least could not return. And then there came the thought of all the hope and love that centred upon these children, and all the possibilities which lay before them. And I began to think of my own contemporaries and of how little on the whole they had done; it was not fair perhaps to say that most of them had made a mess of their lives, because they were honest, honourable citizens many of them. It was not the poor thing called success that I was thinking of, but a sort of high-hearted and generous dealing with life, making the most of one's faculties and qualities, diffusing a glow of love and enthusiasm and brave zest about one—how few of us had done that! We had grown indolent and money-loving and commonplace. Some of those we looked to to redeem and glorify the world had failed most miserably, through unchecked faults of temperament. Some had declined with a sort of unambitious comfort, some had fallen into the trough of Toryism, and spent their time in holding fast to conventional and established things; one or two had flown like Icarus so near

the sun that their waxen wings had failed them; and yet some of us had missed greatness by so little. Was it to be always so? Was it always to be a battle against hopeless odds? Was defeat, earlier or later, inevitable? The tamest defeat of all was to lapse smoothly into easy conventional ways, to adopt the standards of the world, and rake together contentedly and seriously the straws and dirt of the street. If that was to be the destiny of most, why were we haunted in youth with the sight of that cloudy, gleaming crown within our reach, that sense of romance, that phantom of nobleness? What was the significance of the aspirations that made the heart beat high on fresh sunlit mornings, the dim and beautiful hopes that came beckoning as we looked from our windows in a sunset hour, with the sky flushing red behind the old towers, the sense of illimitable power, of stainless honour, that came so bravely, when the organ bore the voices aloft in the lighted chapel at evensong? Was all that not a real inspiration at all, but a mere accident of boyish vigour? No, it was not a delusion—that was life as it was meant to be lived, and the best victory was to keep that hope alive in the heart amid a hundred failures, a thousand cares.

As I walked thus full of fancies, the boys singly or in groups kept passing me, smiling, full of delighted excitement and chatter, all intent on themselves and their companions. I heard scraps

of their talk, inconsequent names, accompanied with downright praise or blame, unintelligible exploits, happy nonsense. How odd it is to note that when we Anglo-Saxons are at our happiest and most cheerful, we expend so much of our steam in frank derision of each other! Yet though I can hardly remember a single conversation of my school days, the thought of my friendships and alliances is all gilt with a sense of delightful eagerness. Now that I am a writer of books, it matters even more how I say a thing than what I say. But then it was the other way. It was what we felt that mattered, and talk was but the sparkling outflow of trivial thought. What heroes we made of sturdy, unemphatic boys, how we repeated each other's jokes, what merciless critics we were of each other, how little allowance we made for weakness or oddity, how easily we condoned all faults in one who was good-humoured and strong! How the little web of intrigue and gossip, of likes and dislikes, wove and unwove itself! What hopeless Tories we were! How we stood upon our rights and privileges! I have few illusions as to the innocence or the justice or the generosity of boyhood; what boys really admire are grace and effectiveness and readiness. And yet, looking back, one has parted with something, a sort of zest and intensity that one would fain have retained. I felt that I would have given much to be able to have communicated a few of

the hard lessons of experience that I have learnt by my errors and mistakes, to these jolly youngsters; but there again comes in the pathos of boyhood, that one can make no one a present of experience, and that virtue cannot be communicated, or it ceases to be virtue. They were bound, all those ingenuous creatures, to make their own blunders, and one could not save them a single one, for all one's hankering to help. That is of course the secret, that we are here for the sake of experience, and not for the sake of easy happiness. Yet one would keep the hearts of these boys pure and untarnished and strong, if one could, though even as one walked among them one could see faces on which temptation and sin had already written itself in legible signs.

The cricket drew to an end; the shadows began to lengthen on the turf. The mimic warriors were disbanded. The tea-tables made their appearance under the elms, where one was welcomed and waited upon by cheerful matrons and neat maid-servants, and delightfully zealous and inefficient boys. One had but to express a preference to have half-a-dozen plates pressed upon one by smiling Ganymedes. If schools cannot alter character, they certainly can communicate to our cheerful English boys the most delightful manners in the world, so unembarrassed, courteous, easy, graceful, without the least touch of exaggeration or self-consciousness. I suppose one has insular

prejudices, for we are certainly not looked upon as models of courtesy or consideration by our Continental neighbours. I suppose we reserve our best for ourselves. I expressed a wish to look at some of the new buildings, and a young gentleman of prepossessing exterior became my unaffected cicerone. He was not one who dealt in adjectives; his highest epithet of praise was "pretty decent," but one detected an honest and unquestioning pride in the place for all that.

Perhaps the best point of all about these schools of ours, is that the aspect of the place and the tone of the dwellers in it does not vary appreciably on days of festival and on working days. The beauty of it is a little focused and smartened, but that is all. There is no covering up of deficiencies or hiding desolation out of sight. If one goes down to a public-school on an ordinary day, one finds the same brave life, the same unembarrassed courtesy prevailing. There is no sense of being taken by surprise; the life is all open to inspection on any day and at any hour. We do not reserve ourselves for occasions in England. The meat cuts wholesomely and pleasantly wherever it is sampled.

The disadvantage of this is that we are misjudged by foreigners because we are seen, not at our best, but as we are. We do not feel the need of recommending ourselves to the favourable consideration of others; not that that is a virtue, it is rather the shadow of complacency and patriotism.

But at last a feeling begins to arise in the minds both of hosts and guests that the play is played out for the day, that the little festivity is over. On the part of our hosts that feeling manifests itself in a tendency to press departing guests to stay a little longer. An old acquaintance of mine, a shy man, once gave a large garden-party and had a band to play. He did his best for a time and times and half-a-time; but at last he began to feel that the strain was becoming intolerable. With desperate ingenuity he sought out the band-master, told him to leave out the rest of the programme, and play "God Save the King,"—the result being a furious exodus of his guests. To-day no such device is needed. We melt away, leaving our kind entertainers to the pleasant weariness that comes of sustained geniality, and to the sense that three hundred and sixty-four days have to elapse before the next similar festival.

And, for myself, I carry away with me a gracious memory of a day thrilled by a variety of conflicting and profound emotions; and if I feel that perhaps life would be both easier and simpler, if we could throw off a little more of our conventional panoply of thought, could face our problems with a little more candour and directness, yet I have had a glimpse of a community living an eager, full, vigorous life, guarded by sufficient discipline to keep the members of it wholesomely and honourably obedient, and yet

conceding as much personal liberty of thought and action as the general interest of the body can admit. I have seen a place full of high possibilities and hopes, bestowing a treasure of bright memories of work, of play, of friendship, upon the majority of its members, and upholding a Spartan ideal of personal subordination to the common weal, an ideal not enforced by law so much as sustained by honour, an institution which, if it does not encourage originality, is yet a sound reflection of national tendencies, and one in which the men who work it devote themselves unaffectedly and ungrudgingly to the interests of the place, without sentiment perhaps, but without ostentation or priggishness. A place indeed to which one would wish perhaps to add a certain intellectual stimulus, a mental liberty, yet from which there is little that one would desire to take away. For if one would like to see our schools strengthened, amplified and expanded, yet one would wish the process to continue on the existing lines, and not on a different method. So, in our zeal for cultivating the further hope, let us who would fain see a purer standard of morals, a more vigorous intellectual life prevail in our schools, not overlook the marvellous progress that is daily and hourly being made, and keep the taint of fretful ingratitude out of our designs; and meanwhile let us, in the spirit of the old Psalm, wish Jerusalem prosperity "for our brethren and companions' sakes."

XIII

LITERARY FINISH

I HAD two literary men staying with me a week ago, both of them accomplished writers, and interested in their art, not professionally and technically only, but ardently and enthusiastically. I here label them respectively Musgrave and Herries. Musgrave is a veteran writer, a man of fifty, who makes a considerable income by writing, and has succeeded in many departments—biography, criticism, poetry, essay-writing; he lacks, however, the creative and imaginative gift; his observation is acute, and his humour considerable; but he cannot infer and deduce; he cannot carry a situation further than he can see it. Herries on the other hand is a much younger man, with an interest in human beings that is emotional rather than spectacular; while Musgrave is interested mainly in the present, Herries lives in the past or the future. Musgrave sees what people do and how they behave, while Herries is for ever thinking how they must have behaved to produce their present conditions, or how they would be likely to act under different conditions. Musgrave's

one object is to discover what he calls the truth; Herries thrives and battens upon illusions. Musgrave is fond of the details of life, loves food and drink, conviviality and social engagements, new people and unfamiliar places—Herries is quite indifferent to the garniture of life, lives in great personal discomfort, dislikes mixed assemblies and chatter, and has a fastidious dislike of the present, whatever it is, from a sense that possibilities are so much richer than performances. Musgrave admits that he has been more successful as a writer than he deserves; Herries is likely, I think, to disappoint the hopes of his friends, and will not do justice to his extraordinary gifts, from a certain dreaminess and lack of vitality. Musgrave loves the act of writing, and is always full to the brim of matter. Herries dislikes composition, and is yet drawn to it by a sense of fearful responsibility. Neither have, fortunately, the least artistic jealousy. Herries regards a man like Musgrave with a sort of incredulous stupefaction, as a stream of inexplicable volume. Herries has to Musgrave all the interest of a very delicate and beautiful type, whose fastidiousness he can almost envy. As a rule, literary men will not discuss their art among themselves; they have generally arrived at a sort of method of their own, which may not be ideal, but which is the best practical solution for themselves, and they would rather not be disquieted about it; literary talk, too, tends to partake of the

nature of shop, and busy men, as a rule, like to talk the shop of their recreations rather than the shop of their employment. But Musgrave will discuss anything; and as for Herries, writing is not an occupation, so much as a divine vocation which he regards with a holy awe.

The discussion began at dinner, and I was amused to see how it affected the two men. Musgrave, by an incredible mental agility, contrived to continue to take a critical interest in the meal and the argument at the same time; Herries thrust away an unfinished plate, refused what was offered to him, pushed his glasses about as if they were chessmen, filled the nearest with water at intervals—he is a rigid teetotaller—and drank out of them alternately with an abstracted air.

The point was the question of literary finish, and the degree to which it can or ought to be practised. Herries is of the school of Flaubert, and holds that there may be several ways of saying a thing, but only one best way, and that it is alike the duty and the goal of the writer to find that way. This he enunciated with some firmness.

"No," said Musgrave, "I think that is only a theory, and breaks down, as all theories do, when it is put in practice: look at all the really big writers: look at Shakespeare—to me his work gives the impression of being both hasty and

uncorrected. If he says a thing in one way, and while he is doing it thinks of a more telling form of expression, he doesn't erase the first statement; he merely says it over again more effectively. He is full of lapses and inappropriate passages—and it is that very thing which gives him such an air of reality."

"Well, there is a good deal in that," said Herries, "but I do not see how you are going to prove that it is not deliberate. Shakespeare wrote like that in his plays, breathlessly and eagerly, because that was the aim he had in view; if he makes one of his people say a thing tamely, and then more pointedly, it is because it is exactly what people do in real life, and Shakespeare was thinking with their mind for the time being. He is behind the person he has made, moving his arms, looking through his eyes, breathing through his mouth; and just as life itself is hurried and inconsequent, so the perfection of art is, not to be hurried and inconsequent, but to give one the impression of being so. I don't believe he left his work uncorrected out of mere impatience. Look at the way he wrote when he was writing in a different manner—look at the Sonnets, for instance—there is plenty of calculated art there!"

"Yes," I said, "there is art there, but I don't think it is very deliberate art. I don't believe they were written *slowly*. Of course one can hardly

be breathless in a sonnet. The rhymes are all stretched across the ground, like wires, and one has to pick one's way among them."

"Well, take another instance," said Musgrave. "Look at Scott. He speaks himself of his 'hurried frankness of execution.' His proof-sheets are the most extraordinary things, full of impossible sentences, lapses of grammar, and so forth. He did not do much correcting himself, but I believe I am right in saying that his publishers did, and spent hours in reducing the chaos to order."

"Oh, of course I don't deny," said Herries, "that volume and vitality are what matters most. Scott's imagination was at once prodigious and profound. He seems to me to have said to his creations, 'Let the young men now arise and play before us.' But I don't think his art was the better for his carelessness. Great and noble as the result was, I think it would have been greater if he had taken more pains. Of course one regards men of genius like Scott and Shakespeare with a kind of terror—one can forgive them anything; but it is because they do by a sort of prodigal instinct what most people have to do by painful effort. If one's imagination has the poignant rightness of Scott's or Shakespeare's, one's hurried work is better than most people's finished work. But people of lesser force and power, if they get their stitches wrong, have to unpick them and do it all over again. Sometimes I have an uneasy sense,

when I am writing, that my characters are feeling as if their clothes do not fit. Then they have to be undressed, so to speak, that one may see where the garments gall them. Now, take a book like *Madame Bovary*, painfully and laboriously constructed—it seems obvious enough, yet the more one reads it the more one becomes aware how every stroke and detail tell. What almost appals me about that book is the way in which the end is foreseen in the beginning, the way in which Flaubert seems to have carried the whole thing in his head all the time, to have known exactly where he was going and how fast he was going."

"That is perfectly true," I said. "But take an instance of another of Flaubert's books, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, where the same method is pursued with what I can only call deplorable results. Every detail is perfect of its kind. The two grotesque creatures take up one pursuit after another, agriculture, education, antiquities, horticulture, distilling perfumes, making jam. In each they make exactly the absurd mistakes that such people would have made; but one loses all sense of reality, because one feels that they would not have taken up so many things; it is only a collection of typical absurdities. Given the men and the particular pursuit, it is all natural enough, but one wearies of the same process being applied an impossible number of times, just as Flaubert was often so intolerable in real life, because he ran a

joke to death, and never knew when to put it down. The result in *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is a lack of proportion and subordination. It is like one of the early Pre-Raphaelite pictures, in which every detail is painted with minute perfection. It was all there, no doubt, and it was all exactly like that; but that is not how the human eye apprehends a scene. The human mind takes a central point, and groups the accessories round it. In art, I think everything depends upon centralisation. Two lovers part, and the birds' faint chirp from the leafless tree, the smouldering rim of the sunset over misty fields, are true and symbolical parts of the scene; but if you deal in botany and ornithology and meteorology at such a moment, you cloud and dim the central point—you digress when you ought only to emphasise.

"Oh yes," said Herries with a sigh, "that is all right enough—it all depends upon proportion; and the worst of all these discussions on points of art is that each person has to find his own standard—one can't accept other people's standards. To me *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is a piece of almost flawless art—it is there—it lives and breathes. I don't like it all, of course, but I don't doubt that it happened so. There must be an absolute rightness behind all supreme writing. Art must have laws as real and immutable and elaborate as those of science and metaphysics and religion—that is the central article of my creed."

"But the worst of that theory is," I said, "that one lays down canons of taste, which are very neat and pretty; and then there comes some new writer of genius, knocks all the old canons into fragments, and establishes a new law. Canons of art seem to me sometimes nothing more than classifications of the way that genius works. I find it very hard to believe that there is a pattern, so to speak, for the snuffers and the candlesticks, revealed to Moses in the mount. It was Moses' idea of a pair of snuffers, when all is said."

"I entirely agree," said Musgrave; "the only ultimate basis of all criticism is, 'I like it because I like it'—and the connoisseurs of any age are merely the people who have the faculty of agreeing, I won't say with the majority, but with the majority of competent critics."

"No, no," said Herries, raising his mournful eyes to Musgrave's face, "don't talk like that! You take my faith away from me. Surely there must be some central canon of morality in art, just as there is in ethics. For instance, in ethics, is it conceivable that cruelty might become right, if only enough people thought it was right? Is there no absolute principle at all? In art, what about the great pictures and the great poems, which have approved themselves to the best minds in generation after generation? Their rightness and their beauty are only attested by critics, they are surely not created by them? My view is that

there is an absolute law of beauty, and that we grow nearer to it by slow degrees. Sometimes, as with the Greeks, people got very near to it indeed. Is it conceivable, for instance, that men could ever come to regard the Venus of Milo as ugly?"

"Why yes," said Musgrave, laughing, "I suppose that if humanity developed on different lines, and a new type of beauty became desirable, we might come to look upon the Venus of Milo as a barbarous and savage kind of object, a dreadful parody of what we had become, like a female chimpanzee. To a male chimpanzee, the wrinkled brow, the long upper lip, the deeply indented lines from nose to mouth, of a female chimpanzee in the prime of adolescence, is, I suppose, almost intolerably dazzling and adorable—beauty can only be a relative thing, when all is said."

"We are drifting away from our point," I said. "The question really is whether, as art expands, the principles become fewer or more numerous. My own belief is that the principles do become fewer, but the varieties of expression more numerous. Keats tried to sum it up by saying, 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty'; but it is not a successful maxim, because, as a peevish philosopher said, 'Why in that case have two words for the same thing?'"

"But it is true, in a sense, for all that," said Herries. "What we *have* learnt is that the subject

is of very little importance in art—it is the expression that matters. *Genre* pictures, plots of novels, incidents of plays—they are all rather elementary things. Flaubert looked forward to a time in art when there should be no subjects at all, when art should aspire to the condition of music, and express the intangible."

"I confess," said Musgrave, laughing, "that that statement conveys nothing to me. A painter, on that line, would depict nothing, but simply produce a sort of harmony of colour. A picture would become simply a texture of colour-vibrations. My own view is rather that it is a question of accurate observation, followed by an extreme delicacy and suggestiveness of expression. Some people would say that it was all a question of reality; and that the point is that the writer shall suggest a reality to his reader, even though the picture he evoked in the reader's mind was not the same as the picture in his own mind—but that is to me pure symbolism."

"Exactly," said Herries, "and the more symbolical that art becomes, the purer it becomes—that is precisely what I am aiming at."

"Well," I said, "that gives me an opportunity of making a confession. I have never really been able to understand what technical symbolism in art is. A symbol in the plain sense is something which recalls or suggests to you something else; and thus the whole of art is pure symbolism. The

flick of colour gives you a distant woodland, the phrase gives you a scene or an emotion. Five printed words upon a page makes one suffer or rejoice imaginatively; and my idea of the most perfect art is not the art which gives one a sense of laborious finish, but the art in which you never think of the finish at all, but only of the thing described. The end of effort is to conceal effort, as the old adage says. Some people, I suppose, attain it through a series of misses; but the best art of all goes straight to the heart of the thing."

"Yes," said Musgrave, "my own feeling is that the mistake is to consider it can only be done in one way. Each person has his own way; but I agree in thinking that the best art is the most effortless."

"From the point of view of the onlooker, perhaps," said Herries, "but not from the point of view of the craftsman. The pleasure of art, for the craftsman, is to see what the difficulty was, and to discern how the artist triumphed over it. Think of the delightful individual roughness of old work, as opposed to modern machine-made things. There is an appropriate irregularity, according to the medium employed. The workmanship of a gem is not the same as that of a building; the essence of the gem is to be flawless; but in the building there is a pleasure in the tool-dints, like the pleasure of the rake-marks on the gravel path. Of course music must be flawless too—firm, resolute, inevit-

able, because the medium demands it; but in a big picture—why, the other day I saw a great oil-painting, a noble piece of art—I came upon it in the Academy, by a side door close upon it. The background was a great tangled mass of raw crude smears, more like coloured rags patched together than paint; but a few paces off, the whole melted into a great river-valley, with deep water-meadows of summer grass and big clumps of trees. That is the perfect combination. The man knew exactly what he wanted—he got his effect—the structure was complete, and yet there was the added pleasure of seeing how he achieved it. That is the kind of finish I desire."

"Yes, of course," said Musgrave, "we should all agree about that; but my feeling would be that the way to do it is for the artist to fill himself to the brim with the subject, and to let it burst out. I do not at all believe in the painful pinching and pulling together of a particular bit of work. That sort of process is excellent practice, but it seems to me like the receipt in one of Edwin Lear's Nonsense Books for making some noisome dish, into which all sorts of ingredients of a loathsome kind were to be put; and the directions end with the words: 'Serve up in a cloth, and throw all out of the window as soon as possible.' It is an excellent thing to take all the trouble, if you throw it away when it is done; you will do your next piece of real work all the better; but for a piece of work

to have the best kind of vitality, it must flow, I believe, easily and sweetly from the teeming mind. Take such a book as Newman's *Apologia*, written in a few weeks, a piece of perfect art—but then it was written in tears."

"But on the other hand," said I, "look at Ariosto's *Orlando;* it took ten years to write and sixteen more to correct—and there is not a forced or a languid line in the whole of it."

"Yes," said Musgrave, "it is true, of course, that people must do things in their own way. But, on the whole, the best work is done in speed and glow, and derives from that swift handling a unity, a curve, that nothing else can give. What matters is to have a clear sense of structure, and that, at all events, cannot be secured by poky and fretful treatment. That is where intellectual grasp comes in. But, even so, it all depends upon what one likes, and I confess that I like large handling better than perfection of detail."

"I believe," I said, "that we really all agree. We all believe in largeness and vitality as the essential qualities. But in the lesser kinds of art there is a delicacy and a perfection which are appropriate. An attention to minutiæ which the graving of a gem or the making of a sonnet demands is out of place in a cathedral or an epic. We none of us would approve of hasty, slovenly, clumsy work anywhere; all that is to be demanded is that such irregularity as can be detected should

not be inappropriate irregularity. What we disagree about is only the precise amount of finish which is appropriate to the particular work. Musgrave would hold, in the case of Flaubert, that he was, in his novels, trying to give to the cathedral the finish of the gem, and polishing a colossal statue as though it were a tiny statuette."

"Yes," said Herries mournfully, "I suppose that is right; though when I read of Flaubert spending hours of torture in the search for a single epithet, I do not feel that the sacrifice was made in vain if only the result was achieved."

"But I," said Musgrave, "grudge the time so spent. I would rather have more less-finished work than little exquisite work—though I suppose that we shall come to the latter sometime, when the treasures of art have accumulated even more hopelessly than now, and when nothing but perfect work will have a chance of recognition. Then perhaps a man will spend thirty years in writing a short story, and twenty more in polishing it! But at present there is much that is unsaid which may well be said, and I confess that I do not hanker after this careful and troubled work. It reminds me of the terrible story of the Chinaman who spent fifty years in painting a vase which cracked in the furnace. It seems to me like the worst kind of waste."

"And I, on the other hand," said Herries gravely, "think that such a life is almost as noble a one as I can well conceive."

His words sounded to me like a kind of pontifical blessing pronounced at the end of a liturgical service; and, dinner now being over, we adjourned to the library. Then Musgrave entertained us with an account of a squabble he had lately had with a certain editor, who had commissioned him to write a set of papers on literary subjects, and then had objected to his treatment. Musgrave had trailed his coat before the unhappy man, laid traps for him by dint of asking him ingenuous questions, had written an article elaborately constructed to parody derisively the editor's point of view, had meekly submitted it as one of the series, and then, when the harried wretch again objected, had confronted him with illustrative extracts from his own letters. It was a mirthful if not a wholly good-natured performance. Herries had listened with ill-concealed disgust, and excused himself at the end of the recital on the plea of work.

As the door closed behind him, Musgrave said with a wink, "I am afraid my story has rather disgusted our young transcendentalist. He has no pleasure in a wholesome row; he thinks the whole thing vulgar—and I believe he is probably right; but I can't live on his level, though I am sure it is very fine and all that."

"But what do you really think of his work?" I said. "It is very promising, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Musgrave reflectively, "that is just what it is—he has got a really fine literary gift;

but he is too uncompromising. Idealism in art is a deuced fine thing, and every now and then there comes a man who can keep it up, and can afford to do so. But what Herries does not understand is that there are two sides to art—the theory and the practice. It is just the same with a lot of things—education, for instance, and religion. But the danger is that the theorists become pedantic. They get entirely absorbed in questions of form, and the plain truth is that however good your form is, you have got to get hold of your matter too. The point after all is the application of art to life, and you have got to condescend. Things of which the ultimate end is to affect human beings must take human beings into account. If you aim at appealing only to other craftsmen, it becomes an erudite business: you become like a carpenter who makes things which are of no use except to win the admiration of other carpenters. Of course it may be worth doing if you are content with indicating a treatment which other people can apply and popularise. But if you isolate art into a theory which has no application to life, you are a savant and not an artist. You can't be an artist without being a man, and therefore I hold that humanity comes first. I don't mean that one need be vulgar. Of course I am a mere professional, and my primary aim is to earn an honest livelihood. I frankly confess that I don't pose, even to myself, as a public benefactor. But Herries does not care

either about an income, or about touching other people. Of course I should like to raise the standard. I should like to see ordinary people capable of perceiving what is good art, and not so wholly at the mercy of conventional and melodramatic art. But Herries does not care twopence about that. He is like the Calvinist who is sure of his own salvation, has his doubts about the minister, and thinks every one else irreparably damned. As I say, it is a lofty sort of ideal, but it is not a good sign when that sort of thing begins. The best art of the world—let us say Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare—was contributed by people who probably did not think about it as art at all. Fancy Homer going in for questions of form! It is always, I believe, a sign of decadence when formalism begins. It is just like religion, which starts with a teacher who has an overwhelming sense of the beauty of holiness; and then that degenerates into theology. These young men are to art what the theologians are to religion. They lose sight of the object of the whole thing in codification and definition. My own idea of a great artist is a man who finds beauty so hopelessly attractive and desirable that he can't restrain his speech. It all has to come out; he cannot hold his peace. And then a number of people begin to see that it was what they had been vaguely admiring and desiring all the time; and then a few highly intellectual people think that

they can analyse it, and produce the same effects by applying their analysis. It can't be done so; art must have a life of its own."

"Yes," I said, "I think you are right. Herries is ascetic and eremitical—a beautiful thing in many ways; but there is no transmission of life in such art; it is a sterile thing after all, a seedless flower."

"Let us express the vulgar hope," said Musgrave, "that he may fall in love; that will bring him to his moorings! And now," he added, "we will go to the music-room and I will see if I cannot tempt the shy bird from his roost." And so we did—Musgrave is an excellent musician. We flung the windows open; he embarked upon a great Bach "Toccata"; and before many bars were over, our idealist crept softly into the room, with an air of apologetic forgiveness.

XIV

A MIDSUMMER DAY'S DREAM

I SUPPOSE that every one knows by experience how certain days in one's life have a power of standing out in the memory, even in a tract of pleasant days, all lit by a particular brightness of joy. One does not always know at the time that the day is going to be so crowned; but the weeks pass on, and the one little space of sunlight, between dawn and eve, has orbed itself

> "into the perfect star
> We saw not, when we moved therein."

The thing that in my own case most tends to produce this "grace of congruity," as the schoolmen say, is the presence of the right companion, and it is no less important that he should be in the right mood. Sometimes the right companion is tiresome when he should be gracious, or boisterous when he should be quiet; but when he is in the right mood, he is like a familiar and sympathetic guide on a mountain peak. He helps one at the right point; his desire to push on or to stop coincides with one's own; he is not a hired assistant, but a brotherly comrade. On the day that I am

thinking of I had just such a companion. He was cheerful, accessible, good-humoured. He followed when I wanted to lead, he led when I was glad to follow. He was not ashamed of being unaffectedly emotional, and he was not vaporous or quixotically sentimental. He did not want to argue, or to hunt an idea to death; and we had the supreme delight of long silences, during which our thoughts led us to the same point, the truest test that there is some subtle electrical affinity at work, moving viewlessly between heart and brain.

What no doubt heightened the pleasure for me was that I had been passing through a somewhat dreary period. Things had been going wrong, had tied themselves into knots. Several people whose fortunes had been bound up with my own had been acting perversely and unreasonably—at least I chose to think so. My own work had come to a standstill. I had pushed on perhaps too fast, and I had got into a bare sort of moorland tract of life, and could not discern the path in the heather. There did not seem any particular task for me to undertake; the people whom it was my business to help, if I could, seemed unaccountably and aggravatingly prosperous and independent. Not only did no one seem to want my opinion, but I did not feel that I had any opinions worth delivering. Who does not know the frame of mind? When life seems rather an objectless business, and one is tempted just to let things

slide; when energy is depleted, and the springs of hope are low; when one feels like the family in one of Mrs. Walford's books, who all go out to dinner together, and of whom the only fact that is related is that "nobody wanted them." So fared it with my soul.

But that morning, somehow, the delicious sense had returned, of its own accord, of a beautiful quality in common things. I had sought it in vain for weeks; it had behaved as a cat behaves, the perverse, soft, pretty, indifferent creature. It had stared blankly at my beckoning hand; it had gambolled away into the bushes when I strove to capture it, and looked out at me when I desisted with innocent grey eyes; and now it had suddenly returned uncalled, to caress me as though I had been a long-lost friend, diligently and anxiously sought for in vain. That morning the very scent of breakfast being prepared came to my nostrils like the smoke of a sacrifice in my honour; the shape and hue of the flowers were full of gracious mystery; the green pasture seemed a place where a middle-aged man might almost venture to dance. The sharp chirping of the birds in the shrubbery seemed a concert arranged for my ear. We were soon astir. Like Wordsworth we said that this one day we would give to idleness, though the profane might ask to what that leisurely poet consecrated the rest of his days.

We found ourselves deposited, by a brisk train

—the very stoker seemed to be engaged in the joyful conspiracy—at the little town of St. Ives. I should like to expatiate upon the charms of St. Ives, its clear, broad, rush-fringed river, its quaint brick houses, with their little wharf-gardens, where the trailing nasturtium mirrors itself in the slow flood, its embayed bridge, with the ancient chapel buttressed over the stream—but I must hold my hand; I must not linger over the beauties of the City of Destruction, which I have every reason to believe was a very picturesque place, when our hearts were set on pilgrimage. Suffice it to say that we walked along a pretty riverside causeway, under enlacing limes, past the fine church, under the hanging woods of Houghton Hill—and here we found a mill, a big, timbered place, with a tiled roof, odd galleries and projecting pent-houses, all pleasantly dusted with flour, where a great wheel turned dripping in a fern-clad cavern of its own, with the scent of the weedy river-water blown back from the plunging leat. Oh, the joyful place of streams! River and leat and back-water here ran clear among willow-clad islands, all fringed deep with meadow-sweet and comfrey and butter-bur and melilot. The sun shone overhead among big, white, racing clouds; the fish poised in mysterious pools among trailing water-weeds; and there was soon no room in my heart for anything but the joy of earth and the beauty of it. What did the weary days before and behind matter?

What did casuistry and determinism and fate and the purpose of life concern us then, my friend and me? As little as they concerned the gnats that danced so busily in the golden light, at the corner where the alder dipped her red rootlets to drink the brimming stream.

There we chartered a boat, and all that hot forenoon rowed lazily on, the oars grunting and dripping, the rudder clicking softly through avenues of reeds and water-plants, from reach to reach, from pool to pool. Here we had a glimpse of the wide-watered valley rich in grass, here of silent woods, up-piled in the distance, over which quivered the hot summer air. Here a herd of cattle stood knee-deep in the shallow water, lazily twitching their tails and snuffing at the stream. The birds were silent now in the glowing noon; only the reeds shivered and bowed. There, beside a lock with its big, battered timbers, the water poured green and translucent through a half-shut sluice. Now and then the springs of thought brimmed over in a few quiet words, that came and passed like a breaking bubble—but for the most part we were silent, content to converse with nod or smile. And so we came at last to our goal; a house embowered in leaves, a churchyard beside the water, and a church that seemed to have almost crept to the brink to see itself mirrored in the stream. The place mortals call Hemingford Grey, but it had a new name for me that day which I cannot even

spell—for the perennial difficulty that survives a hundred disenchantments, is to feel that a romantic hamlet seen thus on a day of pilgrimage, with its clustering roofs and chimneys, its waterside lawns, is a real place at all. I suppose that people there live dull and simple lives enough, buy and sell, gossip and back-bite, wed and die; but for the pilgrim it seems an enchanted place, where there can be no care or sorrow, nothing hard, or unlovely, or unclean, but a sort of fairy-land, where men seem to be living the true and beautiful life of the soul, of which we are always in search, but which seems to be so strangely hidden away. It must have been for me and my friend that the wise and kindly artist who lives there in a paradise of flowers had filled his trellises with climbing roses, and bidden the tall larkspurs raise their azure spires in the air. How else had he brought it all to such perfection for that golden hour? Perhaps he did not even guess that he had done it all for my sake, which made it so much more gracious a gift. And then we learned too from a little red-bound volume which I had thought before was a guide-book, but which turned out to-day to be a volume of the Book of Life, that the whole place was alive with the calling of old voices. At the little church there across the meadows the portly, tender-hearted, generous Charles James Fox had wedded his bride. Here, in the pool below, Cowper's dog had dragged out for him the

yellow water-lily that he could not reach; and in the church itself was a little slab where two tiny maidens sleep, the sisters of the famous Miss Gunnings, who set all hearts ablaze by their beauty, who married dukes and earls, and had spent their sweet youth in a little ruined manor-house hard by. I wonder whether after all the two little girls, who died in the time of roses, had not the better part; and whether the great Duchess, who showed herself so haughty to poor Boswell, when he led his great dancing Bear through the grim North, did not think sometimes in her state of the childish sisters with whom she had played, before they came to be laid in the cool chancel beside the slow stream.

And then we sate down for a little on the churchyard wall, and watched the water-grasses trail and the fish poise. In that sweet corner of the churchyard, at a certain season of the year, grow white violets; they had dropped their blooms long ago; but they were just as much alive as when they were speaking aloud to the world with scent and colour; I can never think of flowers and trees as not in a sense conscious; I believe all life to be conscious of itself, and I am sure that the flowering time is the happy time for flowers as much as it is for artists.

Close to us here was a wall, with a big, solid Georgian house peeping over, blinking with its open windows and sun-blinds on to a smooth,

shaded lawn, full of green glooms and leafy shelters. Why did it all give one such a sense of happiness and peace, even though one had no share in it, even though one knew that one would be treated as a rude and illegal intruder if one stepped across and used it as one's own?

This is a difficult thing to analyse. It all lies in the imagination; one thinks of a long perspective of sunny afternoons, of leisurely people sitting out in chairs under the big sycamore, reading perhaps, or talking quietly, or closing the book to think, the memory re-telling some old and pretty tale; and then perhaps some graceful girl comes out of the house with a world of hopes and innocent desires in her wide-open eyes; or a tall and limber boy saunters out bare-headed and flannelled, conscious of life and health, and steps down to the punt that lies swinging at its chain—one hears it rattle as it is untied and flung into the prow; and then the dripping pole is plunged and raised, and the punt goes gliding away, through zones of glimmering light and shadow, to the bathing-pool. All that comes into one's mind; one takes life, and subtracts from it all care and anxiety, all the shadow of failure and suffering, sees it as it might be, and finds it good. That is the first element of the charm. And then there comes into the picture a further and more reflective charm, that which Tennyson called the passion of the past; the thought that all this beautiful life

is slipping away, even as it forms itself, that one cannot stay it for an instant, but that the shadow creeps across the dial, and the church-clock tells the hours of the waning day. It is a mistake to think that such a sense comes of age and experience; it is rather the other way, for never is the regretful sense of the fleeting quality of things realised with greater poignancy than when one is young. When one grows older one begins to expect a good deal of dissatisfaction and anxiety to be mingled with it all, one finds the old Horatian maxim becoming true:

"Vitae summa brevis nos spem vitat inchoare longam,"

and one learns to be grateful for the sunny hour; but when one is young, one feels so capable of enjoying it all, so impatient of shadow and rain, that one cannot bear that the sweet wine of life should be diluted.

That is, I believe, the analysis of the charm of such a scene; the possibility of joy, and permanence, tinged with the pathos that it has no continuance, but rises and falls and fades like a ripple in the stream.

The disillusionment of experience is a very different thing from the pathos of youth; for in youth the very sense of pathos is in itself an added luxury of joy, giving it a delicate beauty which, if it were not so evanescent, it could not possess.

But then comes the real trouble, the heavy

anxiety, the illness, the loss; and those things, which looked so romantic in the pages of poets and the scenes of story-writers, turn out not to be romantic at all, but frankly and plainly disagreeable and intolerable things. The boy who swept down the shining reaches with long, deft strokes becomes a man—money runs short, his children give him anxiety, his wife becomes ailing and fretful, he has a serious illness; and when after a day of pain he limps out in the afternoon to the shadow of the old plane-tree, he must be a very wise and tranquil and patient man, if he can still feel to the full the sweet influences of the place, and be still absorbed and comforted by them.

And here lies the weakness of the epicurean and artistic attitude, that it assorts so ill with the harder and grimmer facts of life. Life has a habit of twitching away the artistic chair with all its cushions from under one, with a rude suddenness, so that one has, if one is wise, to learn a mental agility and to avoid the temptation of drowsing in the land where it is always afternoon. The real attitude is to be able to play a robust and manful part in the world, and yet to be able to banish the thought of the bank-book and the ledger from the mind, and to submit oneself to the sweet influences of summer and sun.

> "He who of such delights can judge, and spare
> To interpose them oft is not unwise."

So sang the old Puritan poet; and there is a large

wisdom in the word *oft* which I have abundantly envied, being myself an anxious-minded man!

The solution is *balance*—not to think that the repose of art is all, and yet on the other hand not to believe that life is always jogging and hustling one. The way in which one can test one's progress is by considering whether activities and tiresome engagements are beginning to fret one unduly, for if so one is becoming a hedonist; and on the other hand by being careful to observe whether one becomes incapable of taking a holiday; if one becomes bored and restless and hipped in a cessation of activities, then one is suffering from the disease of Martha in the Gospel story; and of the two sisters we may remember that Martha was the one who incurred a public rebuke.

What one has to try to perceive is that life is designed not wholly for discomfort, or wholly for ease, but that we are here as learners, one and all. Sometimes the lesson comes whispering through the leaves of the plane-tree, with the scent of violets in the air; sometimes it comes in the words and glances of a happy circle full of eager talk, sometimes through the pages of a wise book, and sometimes in grim hours, when one tosses sleepless on one's bed under the pressure of an intolerable thought—but in each and every case we do best when we receive the lesson as willingly and large-heartedly as we can.

Perhaps, in some of my writings, those who have read them have thought that I have unduly emphasised the brighter, sweeter, more tranquil side of life. I have done so deliberately, because I believe that we should follow innocent joy as far as we can. But it is not because I am unaware of the other side. I do not think that any of the windings of the dark wood of which Dante speaks are unknown to me, and there are few tracts of dreariness that I have not trodden reluctantly. I have had physical health and much seeming prosperity; but to be acutely sensitive to the pleasures of happiness and peace is generally to be morbidly sensitive to the burden of cares. Unhappiness is a subjective thing. As Mrs. Gummidge so truly said, when she was reminded that other people had their troubles, "I feel them more." And if I have upheld the duty of seeking peace, it has been like a preacher who preaches most urgently against his own bosom-sins. But I am sure of this, that however impatiently one mourns one's fault and desires to be different, the secret of growth lies in that very sorrow, perhaps in the seeming impotence of that sorrow. What one must desire is to learn the truth, however much one may shudder at it; and the longer that one persists in one's illusions, the longer is one's learning-time. Is it not a bitter comfort to know that the truth is there, and that what we believe or do not believe about it makes no difference at all? Yes, I think it is

a comfort; at all events upon that foundation alone is it possible to rest.

How far one drifts in thought away from the sweet scene which grows sweeter every hour. The heat of the day is over now; the breeze curls on the stream, the shadow of the tower falls far across the water. My companion rises and smiles, thinking me lost in indolent content; he hardly guesses how far I have been voyaging

"On strange seas of thought alone."

Does he guess that as I look back over my life, pain has so far preponderated over happiness that I would not, if I could, live it again, and that I would not in truth, if I could choose, have lived it at all? And yet, even so, I recognise that I am glad not to have the choice, for it would be made in an indolent and timid spirit, and I do indeed believe that the end is not yet, and that the hour will assuredly come when I shall rejoice to have lived, and see the meaning even of my fears.

And then we retrace our way, and like the Lady of Shalott step down into the boat, to glide along the darkling water-way in the westering light. Why cannot I speak to my friend of such dark things as these? It would be better perhaps if I could, and yet no hand can help us to bear our own burden.

But the dusk comes slowly on, merging reed and pasture and gliding stream in one indis-

tinguishable shade; the trees stand out black against the sunset, thickening to an emerald green. A star comes out over the dark hill, the lights begin to peep out in the windows of the clustering town as we draw nearer. As we glide beneath the dark houses, with their gables and chimneys dark against the glowing sky, how everything that is dull and trivial and homely is blotted out by the twilight, leaving nothing but a sense of romantic beauty of mysterious peace! The little town becomes an enchanted city full of heroic folk; the figure that leans silently over the bridge to see us pass, to what high-hearted business is he vowed, burgher or angel? A spell is woven of shadow and falling light, and of chimes floating over meadow and stream. Yet this sense of something remotely and unutterably beautiful, this transfiguration of life, is as real and vital an experience as the daily, dreary toil, and to be welcomed as such. Nay, more! it is better, because it gives one a deepened sense of value, of significance, of eternal greatness, to which we must cling as firmly as we may, because it is there that the final secret lies; not in the poor struggles, the anxious delays, which are but the incidents of the voyage, and not the serene life of haven and home.

XV

SYMBOLS

THE present time is an era when intellectual persons are ashamed of being credulous. It is the perfectly natural and desirable result of the working of the scientific spirit. Everything is relentlessly investigated, the enormous structure of natural law is being discovered to underlie all the most surprising, delicate, and apparently fortuitous processes, and no one can venture to forecast where the systematisation will end. The result is a great inrush of bracing and invigorating candour. It is not that our liberty of reflection and action is increased. It is rather increasingly limited. But at least we are growing to discern where our boundaries are, and it is deeply refreshing to find that the boundaries erected by humanity are much closer and more cramping than the boundaries determined by God. We are no longer bound by human authority, by subjective theories, by petty tradition. We are no longer required to tremble before thaumaturgy and conjuring and occultism. It is true that science has hitherto confined itself mainly to the

investigation of concrete phenomena; but the same process is sure to be applied to metaphysics, to sociology, to psychology; and the day will assuredly come when the human race will analyse the laws which govern progress, which regulate the exact development of religion and morality.

The demolition of credulity is, as I have said, a wholly desirable and beneficial thing. Most intelligent people have found some happiness in learning that the dealings of God—that is, the creative and originative power behind the universe—are at all events not whimsical, however unintelligible they may be. No one at all events is now required to reconcile with his religious faith a detailed belief in the Mosaic cosmogony, or to accept the fact that a Hebrew prophet was enabled to summon bears from a wood to tear to pieces some unhappy boys who found food for mirth in his personal appearance. That is a pure gain. But side by side with this entirely wholesome process, there are a good many people who have thrown overboard, together with their credulity, a quality of a far higher and nobler kind, which may be called faith. Men who have seen many mysteries explained, and many dark riddles solved in nature, have fallen into what is called materialism, from the mistaken idea that the explanation of material phenomena will hold good for the discernment of abstract phenomena. Yet any one who approaches the results of scientific investiga-

tion in a philosophical and a poetical spirit, sees clearly enough that nothing has been attempted but analysis, and that the mystery which surrounds us is only thrust a little further off, while the darkness is as impenetrable and profound as ever. All that we have learnt is how natural law works; we have not come near to learning why it works as it does. All we have really acquired is a knowledge that the audacious and unsatisfactory theories, such, for instance, as the old-fashioned scheme of redemption, by which men have attempted with a pathetic hopefulness to justify the ways of God to man, are, and are bound to be, despairingly incomplete. The danger of the scientific spirit is not that it is too agnostic, but that it is not agnostic enough: it professes to account for everything when it only has a very few of the data in its grasp. The materialistic philosophy tends to be a tyranny which menaces liberty of thought. Every one has a right to deduce what theory he can from his own experience. The one thing that we have no sort of right to do is to enforce that theory upon people whose experience does not confirm it. We may invite them to act upon our assumptions, but we must not blame them if they end by considering them to be baseless. I was talking the other day to an ardent Roman Catholic, who described by a parable the light in which he viewed the authority of the Church. He said that it was as if he were

half-way up a hill, prevented from looking over into a hidden valley by the slope of the ground. On the hill-top, he said, might be supposed to stand people in whose good faith and accuracy of vision he had complete confidence. If they described to him what they saw in the valley beyond, he would not dream of mistrusting them. But the analogy breaks down at every point, because the essence of it is that every one who reached the hill-top would inevitably see the same scene. Yet in the case of religion, the hill-top is crowded by people, whose good faith is equally incontestable, but whose descriptions of what lies beyond are at hopeless variance. Moreover all alike confess that the impressions they derive are outside the possibility of scientific or intellectual tests, and that it is all a matter of inference depending upon a subjective consent in the mind of the discerner to accept what is incapable of proof. The strength of the scientific position is that the scientific observer is in the presence of phenomena confirmed by innumerable investigations, and that, up to a certain point, the operation of a law has been ascertained, which no reasonable man has any excuse for doubting. Whenever that law conflicts with religious assumptions, which in any case cannot be proved to be more than subjective assumptions, the unverifiable theory must go down before the verifiable. Religion may assume, for instance, that life is an educative process; but

that theory cannot be considered proved in the presence of the fact that many human beings close their eyes upon the world before they are capable of exercising any moral or intellectual choice whatever.

It may prove, upon investigation, that all religious theories and all creeds are nothing more than the desperate and pathetic attempts of humanity, conscious of an instinctive horror of suffering, and of an inalienable sense of their right to happiness, to provide a solution for the appalling fact that many human beings seem created only to suffer and to be unhappy. The mystery is a very dark one; and philosophy is still not within reach of explaining how it is that a sense of justice should be implanted in man by the Power that appears so often to violate that conception of justice.

The fact is that the progress of science has created an immense demand for the quality of faith and hopefulness, by revealing so much that is pessimistic in the operation of natural law. If we are to live with any measure of contentment or tranquillity, we must acquire a confidence that God has not, as science tends to indicate, made all men for nought. We must, if we can, acquire some sort of hope that it is not in mere wantonness and indifference that He confronts us with the necessity for bearing the things that He has made us most to dread. It may be easy enough

for robust, vigorous, contented persons to believe that God means us well; but the only solution that is worth anything is a solution that shall give us courage, patience, and even joy, at times when everything about us seems to speak of cruelty and terror and injustice. One of the things that has ministered comfort in large measure to souls so afflicted is the power of tracing a certain beauty and graciousness in the phenomena that surround us. Who is there who in moments of bewildered sorrow has not read a hint of some vast lovingness, moving dimly in the background of things, in the touch of familiar hands or in the glances of dear eyes? Surely, they have said to themselves, if love is the deepest, strongest, and most lasting force in the world, the same quality must be hidden deepest in the Heart of God. This is the unique strength of the Christian revelation, the thought of the Fatherhood of God, and His tender care for all that he has made. Again, who is there who in depression and anxiety has not had his load somewhat lightened by the sight of the fresh green of spring foliage against a blue sky, by the colour and scent of flowers, by the sweet melody of musical chords? The aching spirit has said, "They are there—beauty, and peace, and joy—if I could but find the way to them." Who has not had his fear of death alleviated by the happy end of some beloved life, when the dear one has made, as it were, solemn haste to be gone, falling gently

into slumber? Who is there, who, speeding homewards in the sunset, has seen the dusky orange veil of flying light drawn softly westward over misty fields, where the old house stands up darkling among the glimmering pastures, and has not felt the presence of some sweet secret waiting for him beyond the gates of life and death? All these things are symbols, because the emotions they arouse are veritably there, as indisputable a phenomenon as any fact which science has analysed. The miserable mistake that many intellectual people make is to disregard what they would call vague emotions in the presence of scientific truth. Yet such emotions have a far more intimate concern for us than the dim sociology of bees, or the concentric forces of the stars. Our emotions are far more true and vivid experiences for us than indisputable laws of nature which never cut the line of our life at all. We may wish, perhaps, that the laws of such emotions were analysed and systematised too, for it is a very timid and faltering spirit that thinks that definiteness is the same as profanation. We may depend upon it that the deeper we can probe into such secrets, the richer will our conceptions of life and God become.

The mistake that is so often made by religious organisations, which depend so largely upon symbolism, is the terrible limiting of this symbolism to traditional ceremonies and venerable ritual. It has been said that religion is the only form of poetry

accessible to the poor; and it is true in the sense that anything which hallows and quickens the most normal and simple experiences of lives divorced from intellectual and artistic influences is a very real and true kind of symbolism. It may be well to give people such symbolism as they can understand, and the best symbols of all are those that deal with the commonest emotions. But it is a lean wisdom that emphasises a limited range of emotions at the expense of a larger range; and the spirit which limits the sacred influences of religion to particular buildings and particular rites is very far removed from the spirit of Him who said that neither at Gerizim nor in Jerusalem was the Father to be worshipped, but in spirit and in truth. At the same time the natural impatience of one who discerns a symbolism all about him, in tree and flower, in sunshine and rain, and who hates to see the range restricted, is a feeling that a wise and tolerant man ought to resist. It is ill to break the pitcher because the well is at hand! One does not make a narrow soul broader by breaking down its boundaries, but by revealing the beauty of the further horizon. Even the false feeling of compassion must be resisted. A child is more encouraged by listening patiently to its tale of tiny exploits, than by casting ridicule upon them.

But on the other hand it is a wholly false timidity for one who has been brought up to

love and reverence the narrower range of symbols, to choke and stifle the desires that stir in his heart for the wider range, out of deference to authority and custom. One must not discard a cramping garment until one has a freer one to take its place; but to continue in the confining robe with the larger lying ready to one's hand, from a sense of false pathos and unreasonable loyalty, is a piece of foolishness.

There are, I believe, hundreds of men and women now alive, who have outgrown their traditional faith, through no fault of their own; but who out of terror at the vague menaces of interested and Pharisaical persons do not dare to break away. One must of course weigh carefully whether one values comfort or liberty most. But what I would say is that it is of the essence of a faith to be elastic, to be capable of development, to be able to embrace the forward movement of thought. Now so far am I from wishing to suggest that we have outgrown Christianity, that I would assert that we have not yet mastered its simplest principles. I believe with all my soul that it is still able to embrace the most daring scientific speculations, for the simple reason that it is hardly concerned with them at all. Where religious faith conflicts with science is in the tenacity with which it holds to the literal truth of the miraculous occurrences related in the Scriptures. Some of these present no difficulty, some appear to be scientifi-

cally incredible. Yet these latter seem to me to be but the perfectly natural contemporary setting of the faith, and not to be of the essence of Christianity at all. Miracles, whether they are true or not, are at all events unverifiable, and no creed that claims to depend upon the acceptance of unverifiable events can have any vitality. But the personality, the force, the perception of Christ Himself emerges with absolute distinctness from the surrounding details. We may not be in a position to check exactly what He said and what He did not say, but just as no reasonable man can hold that He was merely an imaginative conception invented by people who obviously did not understand Him, so the general drift of His teaching is absolutely clear and convincing.

What I would have those do who can profess themselves sincerely convinced Christians, in spite of the uncertainty of many of the recorded details, is to adopt a simple compromise; to claim their part in the inheritance of Christ, and the symbols of His mysteries, but not to feel themselves bound by any ecclesiastical tradition. No one can forbid, by peevish regulations, direct access to the spirit of Christ and to the love of God. Christ's teaching was a purely individualistic teaching, based upon conduct and emotion, and half the difficulties of the position lie in His sanction and guidance having been claimed for what is only a human attempt to organise a society with a due deference

for the secular spirit, its aims and ambitions. The sincere Christian should, I believe, gratefully receive the simple and sweet symbols of unity and forgiveness; but he should make his own a far higher and wider range of symbols, the symbols of natural beauty and art and literature—all the passionate dreams of peace and emotion that have thrilled the yearning hearts of men. Wherever those emotions have led men along selfish, cruel, sensual paths, they must be distrusted, just as we must distrust the religious emotions which have sanctioned such divergences from the spirit of Christ. We must believe that the essence of religion is to make us alive to the love of God, in whatever writing of light and air, of form and fragrance it is revealed; and we must further believe that religion is meant to guide and quicken the tender, compassionate, brotherly emotions, by which we lean to each other in this world where so much is dark. But to denounce the narrower forms of religion, or to abstain from them, is utterly alien to the spirit of Christ. He obeyed and reverenced the law, though He knew that the expanding spirit of His own teaching would break it in pieces. Of course, since liberty is the spirit of the Gospel, a liberty conditioned by the sense of equality, there may be occasions when a man is bound to resist what appears to him to be a moral or an intellectual tyranny. But short of that, the only thing of which one must beware is a conscious in-

sincerity; and the limits of that a man must determine for himself. There are occasions when consideration for the feelings of others seems to conflict with one's own sense of sincerity; but I think that one is seldom wrong in preferring consideration for others to the personal indulgence of one's own apparent sincerity.

Peace and gentleness always prevail in the end over vehemence and violence, and a peaceful revolution brings about happier results for a country, as we have good reason to know, than a revolution of force. Even now the narrower religious systems prevail more in virtue of the gentleness and goodwill and persuasion of their ministers than through the spiritual terrors that they wield —the thunders are divorced from the lightning.

Thus may the victories of faith be won, not by noise and strife, but by the silent motion of a resistless tide. Even now it creeps softly over the sand and brims the stagnant pools with the freshening and invigorating brine.

But in the worship of the symbol there is one deep danger; and that is that if one rests upon it, if one makes one's home in the palace of beauty or philosophy or religion, one has failed in the quest. It is the pursuit not of the unattained but of the unattainable to which we are vowed. Nothing but the unattainable can draw us onward. It is rest that is forbidden. We are pilgrims yet; and if, intoxicated and bemused by beauty or emotion

or religion, we make our dwelling there, it is as though we slept in the enchanted ground. Enough is given us, and no more, to keep us moving forwards. To be satisfied is to slumber. The melancholy that follows hard in the footsteps of art, the sadness haunting the bravest music, the aching, troubled longing that creeps into the mind at the sight of the fairest scene, is but the warning presence of the guide that travels with us and fears that we may linger. Who has not seen across a rising ground the gables of the old house, the church tower, dark among the bare boughs of the rookery in a smiling sunset, and half lost himself at the thought of the impossibly beautiful life that might be lived there? To-day, just when the western sun began to tinge the floating clouds with purple and gold, I saw by the roadside an old labourer, fork on back, plodding heavily across a ploughland all stippled with lines of growing wheat. Hard by a windmill whirled its clattering arms. How I longed for something that would render permanent the scene, sight, and sound alike. It told me somehow that the end was not yet. What did it stand for? I hardly know; for life, slow and haggard with toil, hard-won sustenance, all overhung with the crimson glories of waning light, the wet road itself catching the golden hues of heaven. A little later, passing by the great pauper asylum that stands up so naked among the bare fields, I looked over a hedge, and there, behind

the engine-house with its heaps of scoriæ and rubbish, lay a little trim ugly burial-ground, with a dismal mortuary, upon which some pathetic and tawdry taste had been spent. There in rows lay the mouldering bones of the failures of life and old sin; not even a headstone over each with a word of hope, nothing but a number on a tin tablet. Nothing more incredibly sordid could be devised. One thought of the sad rite, the melancholy priest, the handful of relatives glad at heart that the poor broken life was over and the wretched associations at an end. Yet even that sight too warned one not to linger, and that the end was not yet. Presently, in the gathering twilight, I was making my way through the streets of the city. The dusk had obliterated all that was mean and dreary. Nothing but the irregular house-fronts stood up against the still sky, the lighted windows giving the sense of home and ease. A quiet bell rang for vespers in a church tower, and as I passed I heard an organ roll within. It all seemed a sweetly framed message to the soul, a symbol of joy and peace.

But then I reflected that the danger was of selecting, out of the symbols that crowded around one on every side, merely those that ministered to one's own satisfaction and contentment. The sad horror of that other place, the little bare place of desolate graves—that must be a symbol as well, that must stand as a witness of some part of the

awful mind of God, of the strange flaw or rent that seems to run through His world. It may be more comfortable, more luxurious to detach the symbol that testifies to the satisfaction of our needs; but not thus do we draw near to truth and God. And then I thought that perhaps it was best, when we are secure and careless and joyful, to look at times steadily into the dark abyss of the world, not in the spirit of morbidity, not with the sense of the *macabre*—the skeleton behind the rich robe, death at the monarch's shoulder; but to remind ourselves, faithfully and wisely, that for us too the shadow waits; and then that in our moments of dreariness and heaviness we should do well to seek for symbols of our peace, not thrusting them peevishly aside as only serving to remind us of what we have lost and forfeited, but dwelling on them patiently and hopefully, with a tender onlooking to the gracious horizon with all its golden lights and purple shadows. And thus not in a mercantile mood trafficking for our delight in the mysteries of life—for not by prudence can we draw near to God—but in a childlike mood, valuing the kindly word, the smile that lights up the narrow room and enriches the austere fare, and paying no heed at all to the jealousies and the covetous ingathering that turns the temple of the Father into a house of merchandise.

For here, deepest of all, lies the worth of the

symbol; that this life of ours is not a little fretful space of days, rounded with a sleep, but an integral part of an inconceivably vast design, flooding through and behind the star-strewn heavens; that there is no sequence of events as we conceive, that acts are not done or words said, once and for all, and then laid away in the darkness; but that it is all an ever-living thing, in which the things that we call old are as much present in the mind of God as the things that shall be millions of centuries hence. There is no uncertainty with Him, no doubt as to what shall be hereafter; and if we once come near to that truth, we can draw from it, in our darkest hours, a refreshment that cannot fail; for the saddest thought in the mind of man is the thought that these things could have been, could be other than they are; and if we once can bring home to ourselves the knowledge that God is unchanged and unchangeable, our faithless doubts, our melancholy regrets melt in the light of truth, as the hoar-frost fades upon the grass in the rising sun, when every globed dew-drop flashes like a jewel in the radiance of the fiery dawn.

XVI

OPTIMISM

WE Anglo-Saxons are mostly optimists at heart; we love to have things comfortable, and to pretend that they are comfortable when they obviously are not. The brisk Anglo-Saxon, if he cannot reach the grapes, does not say that the grapes are sour, but protests that he does not really care about grapes. A story is told of a great English proconsul who desired to get a loan from the Treasury of the Government over which he practically, though not nominally, presided. He went to the Financial Secretary and said: "Look here, T——, you must get me a loan for a business I have very much at heart." The secretary whistled, and then said: "Well, I will try; but it is not the least use." "Oh, you will manage it somehow," said the proconsul, "and I may tell you confidentially it is absolutely essential." The following morning the secretary came to report: "I told you it was no use, sir, and it wasn't; the Board would not hear of it." "Damnation!" said the proconsul, and went on writing. A week after he met the secretary, who felt a little shy.

"By the way, T——," said the great man, "I have been thinking over that matter of the loan, and it was a mercy you were not successful; it would have been a hopeless precedent, and we are much better without it."

That is the true Anglo-Saxon spirit of optimism. The most truly British person I know is a man who will move heaven and earth to secure a post or to compass an end; but when he fails, as he does not often fail, he says genially that he is more thankful than he can say; it would have been ruin to him if he had been successful. The same quality runs through our philosophy and our religion. Who but an Anglo-Saxon would have invented the robust theory, to account for the fact that prayers are often not granted, that prayers are always directly answered whether you attain your desire or not? The Greeks prayed that the gods would grant them what was good even if they did not desire it, and withhold what was evil even if they did desire it. The shrewd Roman said: "The gods will give us what is most appropriate; man is dearer to them than to himself." But the faithful Anglo-Saxon maintains that his prayer is none the less answered even if it be denied, and that it is made up to him in some roundabout way. It is inconceivable to the Anglo-Saxon that there may be a strain of sadness and melancholy in the very mind of God; he cannot understand that there can be any beauty in sorrow. To the

Celt, sorrow itself is dear and beautiful, and the mournful wailing of winds, the tears of the lowering cloud, afford him sweet and even luxurious sensations. The memory of grief is one of the good things that remains to him, as life draws to its close; for love is to him the sister of grief rather than the mother of joy. But this is to the Anglo-Saxon mind a morbid thing. The hours in which sorrow has overclouded him are wasted, desolated hours, to be forgotten and obliterated as soon as possible. There is nothing sacred about them; they are sad and stony tracts over which he has made haste to cross, and the only use of them is to heighten the sense of security and joy. And thus the sort of sayings that satisfy and sustain the Anglo-Saxon mind are such irrepressible outbursts of poets as "God's in His heaven; all's right with the world"—the latter part of which is flagrantly contradicted by experience; and, as for the former part, if it be true, it lends no comfort to the man who tries to find his God in the world. Again, when Browning says that the world "means intensely and means good," he is but pouring oil upon the darting flame of optimism, because there are many people to whom the world has no particular meaning, and few who can re-echo the statement that it means good. That some rich surprise, in spite of palpable and hourly experience to the contrary, may possibly await us, is the most that some of us dare to hope.

My own experience, the older I grow, and the more I see of life, is that I feel it to be a much more bewildering and even terrifying thing than I used to think it. To use a metaphor, instead of its being a patient educational process, which I would give all that I possessed to be able sincerely to believe it to be, it seems to me arranged far more upon the principle of a game of cricket —which I have always held to be, in theory, the most unjust and fortuitous of games. You step to the wicket, you have only a single chance; the boldest and most patient man may make one mistake at the outset, and his innings is over; the timid tremulous player may by undeserved good luck contrive to keep his wicket up, till his heart has got into the right place, and his eye has wriggled straight, and he is set.

That is the first horrible fact about life—that carelessness is often not penalised at all, whereas sometimes it is instantly and fiercely penalised. One boy at school may break every law, human and divine, and go out into the world unblemished. Another timid and good-natured child may make a false step, and be sent off into life with a permanent cloud over him. School life often emphasises the injustice of the world instead of trying to counteract it. Schoolmasters tend to hustle the weak rather than to curb the strong.

And then we pass into the larger world, and what do we see? A sad confusion everywhere.

We see an innocent and beautiful girl struck down by a long and painful disease—a punishment perhaps appropriate to some robust and hoary sinner, who has gathered forbidden fruit with both his hands, and the juices of which go down to the skirts of his clothing; or a brave and virtuous man, with a wife and children dependent on him, needed if ever man was, kind, beneficent, strong, is struck down out of life in a moment. On the other hand, we see a mean and cautious sinner, with no touch of unselfishness and affection, guarded and secured in material contentment. Let any one run over in his mind the memories of his own circle, fill up the gaps, and ask himself bravely and frankly whether he can trace a wise and honest and beneficent design all through. He may try to console himself by saying that the disasters of good people, after all, are the exceptions, and that, as a rule, courage and purity of heart are rewarded, while cowardice and filthiness are punished. But what room is there for exceptions in a world governed by God Whom we must believe to be all-powerful, all-just, and all-loving? It is the wilful sin of man, says the moralist, that has brought these hard things upon him. But that is no answer, for the dark shadow lies as sombrely over irresponsible nature, which groans over undeserved suffering. And then, to make the shadow darker still, we have all the same love of life, the same inalienable sense of our right to

happiness, the same inheritance of love. If we could but see that in the end pain and loss would be blest, there is nothing that we would not gladly bear. Yet that sight, too, is denied us.

And yet we live and laugh and hope, and forget. We take our fill of tranquil days and pleasant companies, though for some of us the thought that it is all passing, passing, even while we lean towards it smiling, touches the very sunlight with pain. "How morbid, how self-tormenting!" says the prudent friend, if such thoughts escape us. "Why not enjoy the delight and bear the pain? That is life; we cannot alter it." But not on such terms, can I, for one, live. To know, to have some assurance—that is the one and only thing that matters at all. For if I once believed that God were careless, or indifferent, or impotent, I would fly from life as an accursed thing; whereas I would give all the peace, and joy, and contentment, that may yet await me upon earth, and take up cheerfully the heaviest burden that could be devised of darkness and pain, if I could be sure of an after-life that will give us all the unclouded serenity, and strength, and love, for which we crave every moment. Sometimes, in a time of strength and calm weather, when the sun is bright and the friend I love is with me, and the scent of the hyacinths blows from the wood, I have no doubt of the love and tenderness of God; and, again, when I wake in the dreadful dawn to the

sharp horror of the thought that one I love is suffering and crying out in pain and drifting on to death, the beauty of the world, the familiar scene, is full of a hateful and atrocious insolence of grace and sweetness; and then I feel that we are all perhaps in the grip of some relentless and inscrutable law that has no care for our happiness or peace at all, and works blindly and furiously in the darkness, bespattering some with woe and others with joy. Those are the blackest and most horrible moments of life; and yet even so we live on.

As I write at my ease I see the velvety grass green on the rich pasture; the tall spires of the chestnut perch, and poise, and sway in the sun; a thrush sings hidden in the orchard; it is all caressingly, enchantingly beautiful, and I am well content to be alive. Looking backwards, I discern that I have had my share, and more than my share, of good things. But they are over; they are mine no longer. And even as I think the thought, the old church clock across the fields tells out another hour that is fallen softly into the glimmering past. If I could discern any strength or patience won from hours of pain and sorrow it would be easier; but the memory of pain makes me dread pain the more, the thought of past sorrow makes future sorrow still more black. I would rather have strength than tranquillity, when all is done; but life has rather taught me my

weakness, and struck the garland out of my reluctant hand.

To-day I have been riding quietly among fields deep with buttercups and fringed by clear, slow streams. The trees are in full spring leaf, only the oaks and walnuts a little belated, unfurling their rusty-red fronds. A waft of rich scent comes from a hawthorn hedge where a hidden cuckoo flutes, or just where the lane turns by the old water-mill, which throbs and grumbles with the moving gear, a great lilac-bush leans out of a garden and fills the air with perfume. Yet, as I go, I am filled with a heavy anxiety, which plays with my sick heart as a cat plays with a mouse, letting it run a little in the sun, and then pouncing upon it in terror and dismay. The beautiful sounds and sights round me—the sight of the quiet, leisurely people I meet—ought, one would think, to soothe and calm the unquiet heart. But they do not; they rather seem to mock and flout me with a savage insolence of careless welfare. My thoughts go back, I do not know why, to an old house where I spent many happy days, now in the hands of strangers. I remember sitting, one of a silent and happy party, on a terrace in the dusk of a warm summer night, and how one of those present called to the owls that were hooting in the hanging wood above the house, so that they drew near in answer to the call, flying noiselessly, and suddenly uttering their plaintive notes from the

heart of the great chestnut on the lawn. Below I can see the dewy glimmering fields, the lights of the little port, the pale sea-line. It seems now all impossibly beautiful and tranquil; but I know that even then it was often marred by disappointments, and troubles, and fears. Little anxieties that have all melted softly into the past, that were easily enough borne, when it came to the point, yet, looming up as they did in the future, filled the days with the shadow of fear. That is the phantom that one ought to lay, if it can be laid. And is there hidden somewhere any well of healing, any pure source of strength and refreshment, from which we can drink and be calm and brave? That is a question which each has to answer for himself. For myself, I can only say that strength is sometimes given, sometimes denied. How foolish to be anxious! Yes, but how inevitable! If the beauty and the joy of the world gave one assurance in dark hours that all was certainly well, the pilgrimage would be an easy one. But can one be optimistic by resolving to be? One can of course control oneself, one can let no murmur of pain escape one, one can even enunciate deep and courageous maxims, because one would not trouble the peace of others, waiting patiently till the golden mood returns. But what if the desolate conviction forces itself upon the mind that sorrow is the truer thing? What if one tests one's own experience, and sees that, under the

pressure of sorrow, one after another of the world's lights are extinguished, health, and peace, and beauty, and delight, till one asks oneself whether sorrow is not perhaps the truest and most actual thing of all? That is the ghastliest of moments, when everything drops from us but fear and horror, when we think that we have indeed found truth at last, and that the answer to Pilate's bitter question is that pain is the nearest thing to truth because it is the strongest. If I felt that, says the reluctant heart, I should abandon myself to despair. No, says sterner reason, you would bear it because you cannot escape from it. Into whatever depths of despair you fell, you would still be upheld by the law that bids you be.

Where, then, is the hope to be found? It is here. One is tempted to think of God through human analogies and symbols. We think of Him as of a potter moulding the clay to his will; as of a statesman that sways a state; as of an artist that traces a fair design. But all similitudes and comparisons break down, for no man can create anything; he can but modify matter to his ends, and when he fails, it is because of some natural law that cuts across his design and thwarts him relentlessly. But the essence of God's omnipotence is that both law and matter are His and originate from Him; so that, if a single fibre of what we know to be evil can be found in the world, either God is responsible for that, or He is dealing with

something He did not originate and cannot overcome. Nothing can extricate us from this dilemma, except the belief that what we think evil is not really evil at all, but hidden good; and thus we have firm ground under our feet at last, and can begin to climb out of the abyss. And then we feel in our own hearts how indomitable is our sense of our right to happiness, how unconquerable our hope; how swiftly we forget unhappiness; how firmly we remember joy; and then we see that the one absolutely permanent and vital power in the world is the power of love, which wins victories over every evil we can name; and if it is so plain that love is the one essential and triumphant force in the world, it must be the very heartbeat of God; till we feel that when soon or late the day comes for us, when our swimming eyes discern ever more faintly the awestruck pitying faces round us, and the senses give up their powers one by one, and the tides of death creep on us, and the daylight dies—that even so we shall find that love awaiting us in the region to which the noblest and bravest and purest, as well as the vilest and most timid and most soiled have gone.

This, then, is the only optimism that is worth the name; not the feeble optimism that brushes away the darker side of life impatiently and fretfully, but the optimism that dares to look boldly into the fiercest miseries of the human spirit, and to come back, as Perseus came, pale and smoke-

stained, from the dim underworld, and say that there is yet hope brightening on the verge of the gloom.

What one desires, then, is an optimism which arises from taking a wide view of things as they are, and taking the worst side into account, not an optimism which is only made possible by wearing blinkers. I was reading a day or two ago a suggestive and brilliant book by one of our most prolific critics, Mr. Chesterton, on the subject of Dickens. Mr. Chesterton is of opinion that our modern tendency to pessimism results from our inveterate realism. Contrasting modern fictions with the old heroic stories, he says that we take some indecisive clerk for the subject of a story, and call the weak-kneed cad "the hero." He seems to think that we ought to take a larger and more robust view of human possibilities, and keep our eyes steadily fixed upon more vigorous and generous characters. But the result of this is the ugly and unphilosophical kind of optimism after all, that calls upon God to despise the work of His own hands, that turns upon all that is feeble and unsightly and vulgar with anger and disdain, like the man in the parable who took advantage of his being forgiven a great debt to exact a tiny one. The tragedy is that the knock-kneed clerk is all in all to himself. In clear-sighted and imaginative moments, he may realise in a sudden flash of horrible insight that he is so far from being what he would desire to be, so unheroic, so loosely

strung, so deplorable—and yet that he can do so little to bridge the gap. The only method of manufacturing heroes is to encourage people to believe in themselves and their possibilities, to assure them that they are indeed dear to God; not to reveal relentlessly to them their essential lowness and shabbiness. It is not the clerk's fault that his mind is sordid and weak, and that his knees knock together; and no optimism is worth the name that has not a glorious message for the vilest. Or, again, it is possible to arrive at a working optimism by taking a very dismal view of everything. There is a story of an old Calvinist minister whose daughter lay dying, far away, of a painful disease, who wrote her a letter of consolation, closing with the words, "Remember, dear daughter, that all short of Hell is mercy." Of course if one can take so richly decisive a view of the Creator's purpose for His creatures, and look upon Hell as the normal destination from which a few, by the overpowering condescension of God, are saved and separated, one might find matter of joy in discovering one soul in a thousand who was judged worthy of salvation. But this again is a clouded view, because it takes no account of the profound and universal preference for happiness in the human heart, and erects the horrible ideal of a Creator who deliberately condemns the vast mass of His creatures to a fate which He has no less deliberately created them to abhor and dread.

Our main temptation after all lies in the fact that we are so impatient of any delay or any uneasiness. We are like the child who, when first confronted with suffering, cannot bear to believe in its existence, and who, if it is prolonged, cannot believe in the existence of anything else. What we have rather to do is to face the problem strongly and courageously, to take into account the worst and feeblest possibilities of our nature, and yet not to overlook the fact that the worst and lowest specimen of humanity has a dim inkling of something higher and happier, to which he would attain if he knew how.

I had a little object-lesson a few days ago in the subject. It was a Bank Holiday, and I walked pensively about the outskirts of a big town. The streets were crowded with people of all sorts and sizes. I confess that a profound melancholy was induced in me by the spectacle of the young of both sexes. They were enjoying themselves, it is true, with all their might; and I could not help wondering why, as a rule, they should enjoy themselves so offensively. The girls walked about, tittering and ogling, the young men were noisy, selfish, ill-mannered, enjoying nothing so much as the discomfiture of any passer-by. They pushed each other into ditches, they tripped up a friend who passed on a bicycle, and all roared in concert at the rueful way in which he surveyed a muddy coat and torn trousers. There seemed to be not

the slightest idea among them of contributing to each other's pleasure. The point was to be amused at the expense of another, and to be securely obstreperous.

But among these there were lovers walking, faint and pale with mutual admiration; a young couple led along a hideous over-dressed child, and had no eyes for anything except its clumsy movements and fatuous questions. Or an elderly couple strolled along, pleased and contented, with a married son and daughter. The cure of the vile mirth of youth seemed after all to be love and the anxious care of other lives.

And thus indeed a gentle optimism did emerge, after all, from the tangle. I felt that it was strange that there should be so much to breed dissatisfaction. I struck out of the town, and soon was passing a mill in broad water-meadows, overhung by great elms; the grass was golden with buttercups, the foliage was rich upon the trees. The water bubbled pleasantly in the great pool, and an old house thrust a pretty gable out over lilacs clubbed with purple bloom. The beauty of the place was put to my lips, like a cup of the waters of comfort. The sadness was the drift of human life out of sweet places such as this, into the town that overflowed the meadows with its avenues of mean houses, where the railway station, with its rows of stained trucks, its cindery floor, its smoking engines, buzzed and roared with life.

But the pessimism of one who sees the simple life fading out, the ancient quietude invaded, the country caught in the feelers of the town, is not a real pessimism at all, or rather it is a pessimism which results from a deficiency of imagination, and is only a matter of personal taste, perhaps of personal belatedness. Twelve generations of my own family lived and died as Yorkshire yeomen-farmers, and my own preference is probably a matter of instinctive inheritance. The point is not what a few philosophers happen to like, but what humanity likes, and what it is happiest in liking. I should have but small confidence in the Power that rules the world, if I did not believe that the vast social development of Europe, its civilisation, its network of communications, its bustle, its tenser living, its love of social excitement was not all part of a great design. I do not believe that humanity is perversely astray, hurrying to destruction. I believe rather that it is working out the possibilities that lie within it; and if human beings had been framed to live quiet pastoral lives, they would be living them still. The one question for the would-be optimist is whether humanity is growing nobler, wiser, more unselfish; and of that I have no doubt whatever. The sense of equality, of the rights of the weak, compassion, brotherliness, benevolence, are living ideas, throbbing with life; the growth of the power of democracy, much as it

may tend to inconvenience one personally, is an entirely hopeful and desirable thing; and if a man is disposed to pessimism, he ought to ask himself seriously to what extent his pessimism is conditioned by his own individual prospect of happiness. It is quite possible to conceive of a man without any hope of personal immortality, or the continuance of individual identity, whose future might be clouded, say, by his being the victim of a painful and incurable disease, and who yet might be a thoroughgoing optimist with regard to the future of humanity. Nothing in the world could be so indicative of the rise in the moral and emotional temperature of the world as the fact that men are increasingly disposed to sacrifice their own ambitions and their own comfort for the sake of others, and are willing to suffer, if the happiness of the race may be increased; and much of the pessimism that prevails is the pessimism of egotists and individualists, who feel no interest in the rising tide, because it does not promise to themselves any increase in personal satisfaction. No man can possibly hold the continuance of personal identity to be an indisputable fact, because there is no sort of direct evidence on the subject; and indeed all the evidence that exists is rather against the belief than for it. The belief is in reality based upon nothing but instinct and desire, and the impossibility of conceiving of life as existing apart from one's own

perception. But even if a man cannot hold that it is in any sense a certainty, he may cherish a hope that it is true, and he may be generously and sincerely grateful for having been allowed to taste, through the medium of personal consciousness, the marvellous experience of the beauty and interest of life, its emotions, its relationships, its infinite yearnings, even though the curtain may descend upon his own consciousness of it, and he himself may become as though he had never been, his vitality blended afresh in the vitality of the world, just as the body of his life, so near to him, so seemingly his own, will undoubtedly be fused and blent afresh in the sum of matter. A man, even though racked with pain and tortured with anxiety, may deliberately and resolutely throw himself into sympathy with the mighty will of God, and cherish this noble and awe-inspiring thought —the thought of the onward march of humanity; righting wrongs, amending errors, fighting patiently against pain and evil, until perhaps, far-off and incredibly remote, our successors and descendants, linked indeed with us in body and soul alike, may enjoy that peace and tranquillity, that harmony of soul, which we ourselves can only momentarily and transitorily obtain.

XVII

JOY

DR. ARNOLD somewhere says that the schoolmaster's experience of being continually in the presence of the hard mechanical high spirits of boyhood is an essentially depressing thing. It seemed to him depressing, just because that happiness was so purely incidental to youth and health, and did not proceed from any sense of principle, any reserve of emotion, any self-restraint, any activity of sympathy. I confess that in my own experience as a schoolmaster the particular phenomenon was sometimes a depressing thing and sometimes a relief. It was depressing when one was overshadowed by a fretful anxiety or a real sorrow, because no appeal to it seemed possible: it had a heartless quality. But again it was a relief when it distracted one from the pressure of a troubled thought, as when, in the *Idylls of the King*, the sorrowful queen was comforted by the little maiden "who pleased her with a babbling heedlessness, which often lured her from herself."

One felt that one had no right to let the sense of anxiety overshadow the natural cheerfulness of

boyhood, and then one made the effort to detach oneself from one's preoccupations, with the result that they presently weighed less heavily upon the heart.

The blessing would be if one could find in experience a quality of joy which should be independent of natural high spirits altogether, a cheerful tranquillity of outlook, which should become almost instinctive through practice, a mood which one could at all events evoke in such a way as to serve as a shield and screen to one's own private troubles, or which at least would prevent one from allowing the shadow of our discontent from falling over others. But it must be to a certain extent temperamental. Just as high animal spirits in some people are irrepressible, and bubble up even under the menace of irreparable calamity, so gloom of spirit is a very contagious thing, very difficult to dissimulate. Perhaps the best practical thing for a naturally melancholy person to try and do, is to treat his own low spirits, as Charles Lamb did, ironically and humorously; and if he must spin conversation incessantly, as Dr. Johnson said, out of his own bowels, to make sure that it is the best thread possible, and of a gossamer quality.

The temperamental fact upon which the possibility of such a philosophical cheerfulness is based is after all an ultimate hopefulness. Some people have a remarkable staying power, a power of look-

ing through and over present troubles, and consoling themselves with pleasant visions of futurity. This is commoner with women than with men, because women derive a greater happiness from the happiness of those about them than men do. A woman as a rule would prefer that the people who surround her should be cheerful, even if she were not cheerful herself; whereas a man is often not ill-pleased that his moods should be felt by his circle, and regards it as rather an insult that other people should be joyful when he is ill-at-ease. Some people, too, have a stronger dramatic sense than others, and take an artistic pleasure in playing a part. I knew a man who was a great invalid and a frequent sufferer, who took a great pleasure in appearing in public functions. He would drag himself from his bed to make a public appearance of any kind. I think that he consoled himself by believing that he did so from a strong and sustaining sense of duty; but I believe that the pleasure of the thing was really at the root of his effort, as it is at the root of most of the duties we faithfully perform. I do not mean that he had a strong natural vanity, though his enemies accused him of it. But publicity was naturally congenial to him, and the only sign, as a rule, that he was suffering, when he made such an appearance, was a greater deliberation of movement, and a ghastly fixity of smile. As to the latter phenomenon, a man with the dramatic

sense strongly developed, will no doubt take a positive pleasure in trying to obliterate from his face and manner all traces of his private discomfort. Such stoicism is a fine quality in its way, but the quality that I am in search of is an even finer one than that. My friend's efforts were ultimately based on a sort of egotism, a profound conviction that a public part suited him, and that he performed it well. What one rather desires to attain is a more sympathetic quality, an interest in other people so vital and inspiring that one's own personal sufferings are light in the scale when weighed against the enjoyment of others. It is not impossible to develop this in the face of considerable bodily suffering. One of the most inveterately cheerful people I have ever known was a man who suffered from a painful and irritating complaint, but whose geniality and goodwill were so strong that they not only overpowered his *malaise*, but actually afforded him considerable relief. Some people who suffer can only suffer in solitude. They have to devote the whole of their nervous energies to the task of endurance; but others find society an agreeable distraction, and fly to it as an escape from discomfort. I suppose that every one has experienced at times that extraordinary rebellion, so to speak, of cheerfulness against an attack of physical pain. There have been days when I have suffered from some small but acutely disagreeable ailment, and yet

found my cheerfulness not only not dimmed but apparently enhanced by the physical suffering. Of course there are maladies even of a serious kind of which one of the symptoms is a great mental depression, but there are other maladies which seem actually to produce an instinctive hopefulness.

But the question is whether it is possible, by sustained effort, to behave independently of one's mood, and what motive is strong enough to make one detach oneself resolutely from discomforts and woes. Good manners provide perhaps the most practical assistance. The people who are brought up with a tradition of highbred courtesy, and who learn almost instinctively to repress their own individuality, can generally triumph over their moods. Perhaps in their expansive moments they lose a little spontaneity in the process; they are cheerful rather than buoyant, gentle rather than pungent. But the result is that when the mood shifts into depression, they are still imperturbably courteous and considerate. A near relation of a great public man, who suffered greatly from mental depression, has told me that some of the most painful minutes he has ever been witness of were, when the great man, after behaving on some occasion of social festivity with an admirable and sustained gaiety, fell for a moment into irreclaimable and hopeless gloom and fatigue, and then again, by a resolute effort,

became strenuously considerate and patient in the privacy of the family circle.

Some people achieve the same mastery over mood by an intensity of religious conviction. But the worst of that particular triumph is that an attitude of chastened religious patience is, not unusually, a rather depressing thing. It is so restrained, so pious, that it tends to deprive life of natural and unaffected joy. If it is patient and submissive in affliction, it is also tame and mild in cheerful surroundings. It issues too frequently in a kind of holy tolerance of youthful ebullience and vivid emotions. It results in the kind of character that is known as saintly, and is generally accompanied by a strong deficiency in the matter of humour. Life is regarded as too serious a business to be played with, and the delight in trifles, which is one of the surest signs of healthy energy, becomes ashamed and abashed in its presence. The atmosphere that it creates is oppressive, remote, ungenial. "I declare that Uncle John is intolerable, except when there is a death in the family—and then he is insupportable," said a youthful nephew of a virtuous clergyman of this type in my presence the other day, adding, after reflection, "He seems to think that to die is the only really satisfactory thing that any one ever does." That is the worst of carrying out the precept, "Set your affections on things above, not on things of the earth," too literally. It is

not so good a precept, after all, as "If a man love not his brother, whom he hath seen, how shall he love God, Whom he hath not seen?" It is somehow an incomplete philosophy to despise the only definite existence we are certain of possessing. One desires a richer thing than that, a philosophy that ends in temperance, rather than in a harsh asceticism.

The handling of life that seems the most desirable is the method which the Platonic Socrates employed. Perhaps he was an ideal figure; but yet there are few figures more real. There we have an elderly man of incomparable ugliness, who is yet delightfully and perennially youthful, bubbling over with interest, affection, courtesy, humour, admiration. With what a delicious mixture of irony and tenderness he treats the young men who surround him! When some lively sparks made up their minds to do what we now call "rag" him, dressed themselves up as Furies, and ran out upon him as he turned a dark corner on his way home, Socrates was not in the least degree disturbed, but discoursed with them readily on many matters and particularly on temperance; when at the banquet the topers disappear, one by one, under the table, Socrates, who, besides taking his due share of the wine, had filled and drunk the contents of the wine-cooler, is found cheerfully sitting, crowned with roses, among the expiring lamps, in the grey of

the morning, discussing the higher mathematics. He is never sick or sorry; he is poor and has a scolding wife; he fasts or eats as circumstances dictate; he never does anything in particular, but he has always infinite leisure to have his talk out. Is he drawn for military service? he goes off, with an entire indifference to the hardships of the campaign. When the force is routed, he stalks deliberately off the field, looking round him like a great bird, with the kind of air that makes pursuers let people alone, as Alcibiades said. And when the final catastrophe draws near, he defends himself under a capital charge with infinite good-humour; he has cared nothing for slander and misrepresentation all his life, and why should he begin now? In the last inspired scene, he is the only man of the group who keeps his courteous tranquillity to the end; he had been sent into the world, he had lived his life, why should he fear to be dismissed? It matters little, in the presence of this august imagination, if the real Socrates was a rude and prosy person, who came by his death simply because the lively Athenians could tolerate anything but a bore!

The Socratic attitude is better than the high-bred attitude; it is better than the stoical attitude, it is even better than the pious attitude; because it depends upon living life to the uttermost, rather than upon detaching oneself from what one considers rather a poor business. The attitude of

Socrates is based upon courage, generosity, simplicity. He knows that it is with fear that we weight our melancholy sensibilities, that it is with meanness and coldness that we poison life, that it is with complicated conventional duties that we fetter our weakness. Socrates has no personal ambitions, and thus he is rid of all envy and uncharitableness; he sees the world as it is, a very bright and brave place, teeming with interesting ideas and undetermined problems. Where Christianity has advanced upon this—for it has advanced splendidly and securely—is in interpreting life less intellectually. The intellectual side of life is what Socrates adores; the Christian faith is applicable to a far wider circle of homely lives. Yet Christianity too, in spite of ecclesiasticism, teems with ideas. Its essence is an unprejudiced freedom of soul. Its problems are problems of character which the simplest child can appreciate. But Christianity, too, is built upon a basis of joy. "Freely ye have received, freely give," is its essential maxim.

The secret then is to enjoy; but the enjoyment must not be that of the spoiler who carries away all that he can, and buries it in his tent; but the joy of relationship, the joy of conspiring together to be happy, the joy of consoling and sympathising and sharing, because we have received so much. Of course there remain the limitations of temperament, the difficulty of preventing our own acrid humours from overflowing

into other lives; but this cannot be overcome by repression; it can only be overcome by tenderness. There are very few people who have not the elements of this in their character. I can count upon my fingers the malevolent men I know, who prefer making others uncomfortable to trying to make them glad; and all these men have been bullied in their youth, and are unconsciously protecting themselves against bullying still. We grow selfish, no doubt, for want of practice; ill-health makes villains of some of us. But we can learn, if we desire it, to keep our gruffness for our own consumption, and a very few experiments will soon convince us that there are few pleasures in the world so reasonable and so cheap, as the pleasure of giving pleasure.

But, after all, the resolute cheerfulness that can be to a certain extent captured and secured by an effort of the will, though it is perhaps a more useful quality than natural joy, and no doubt ranks together in the moral scale, is not to be compared with a certain unreasoning, incommunicable rapture which sometimes, without conscious effort or desire, descends upon the spirit, like sunshine after rain. Let me quote a recent experience of my own which may illustrate it.

A few days ago, I had a busy tiresome morning hammering into shape a stupid prosaic passage, of no suggestiveness; a mere statement, the only beauty of which could be that it should be abso-

lutely lucid; and this beauty it resolutely refused to assume. Then the agent called to see me, and we talked business of a dull kind. Then I walked a little way among fields; and when I was in a pleasant flat piece of ground, full of thickets, where the stream makes a bold loop among willows and alders, the sun set behind a great bastion of clouds that looked like a huge fortification. It had been one of those days of cloudless skies, all flooded with the pale cold honey-coloured light of the winter sun, until a sense almost of spring came into the air; and in a sheltered place I found a little golden hawk-weed in full flower.

It had not been a satisfactory day at all to me. The statement that I had toiled so hard all the morning to make clear was not particularly worth making; it could effect but little at best, and I had only worked at it in a British doggedness of spirit, regardless of its value and only because I was determined not to be beaten by it.

But for all that I came home in a rare and delightful frame of mind, as if I had heard a brief and delicate passage of music, a conspiracy of sweet sounds and rich tones; or as if I had passed through a sweet scent, such as blows from a clover-field in summer. There was no definite thought to disentangle: it was rather as if I had had a glimpse of the land which lies east of the sun and west of the moon, had seen the towers of a castle rise over a wood of oaks; met a company of

serious people in comely apparel riding blithely on the turf of a forest road, who had waved me a greeting, and left me wondering out of what rich kind of scene they had stepped to bless me. It left me feeling as though there were some beautiful life, very near me, all around me, behind the mirror, outside of the door, beyond the garden-hedges, if I could but learn the spell which would open it to me; left me pleasantly and happily athirst for a life of gracious influences and of an unknown and perfect peace; such as creeps over the mind for the moment at the sight of a deep woodland at sunset, when the forest is veiled in the softest of blue mist; or at the sound of some creeping sea, beating softly all night on a level sand; or at the prospect of a winter sun going down into smoky orange vapours over a wide expanse of pastoral country; or at the soft close of some solemn music—when peace seems not only desirable beyond all things but attainable too.

How can one account for this sudden and joyful visitation? I am going to try and set down what I believe to be the explanation, if I can reduce to words a thought which is perfectly clear to me, however transcendental it may seem.

Well, at such a moment as this, one feels just as one may feel when from the streets of a dark and crowded city, with the cold shadow of a cloud passing over it, one sees the green head of a mountain over the housetops, all alone with the

wind and the sun, with its crag-bastions, its terraces and winding turf ways.

The peace that thus blesses one is not, I think, a merely subjective mood, an imagined thing. It is, I believe, a real and actual thing which is there. One's consciousness does not create its impressions, one does not make for oneself the moral and artistic ideas that visit one; one perceives them. Education is not a process of invention—it is a process of discovery; a process of learning the names given to things that are all present in one's own mind. One knows things long before one knows the names for them, by instinct and by intuition; and one's own mind is simply a part of a large and immortal life, which for a time is fenced by a little barrier of identity, just as a tiny pool of sea-water on a sea-beach is for a few hours separated from the great tide to which it belongs. All our regrets, remorses, anxieties, troubles arise from our not realising that we are but a part of this greater and wider life, from our delusion that we are alone and apart instead of, as is the case, one with the great ocean of life and joy.

Sometimes, I know not why and how, we are for a moment or two in touch with the larger life —to some it comes in religion, to some in love, to some in art. Perhaps a wave of the onward sweeping tide beats for an instant into the little pool we call our own, stirring the fringing weed, bubbling sharply and freshly upon the sleeping sand.

The sad mistake we make is, when such a moment comes, to feel as though it were only the stirring of our own feeble imagination. What we ought rather to do is by every effort we can make to welcome and comprehend this dawning of the larger life upon us; not to sink back peevishly into our own limits and timidly to deplore them, but resolutely to open the door again and again—for the door can be opened—to the light of the great sun that lies so broadly about us. Every now and then we have some startling experience which reveals to us our essential union with other individuals. We have many of us had experiences which seem to indicate that there is at times a direct communication with other minds, independent of speech or writing; and even if we have not had such experiences, it has been scientifically demonstrated that such things can occur. Telepathy, as it is clumsily called, which is nothing more than this direct communication of mind, is a thing which has been demonstrated in a way which no reasonable person can reject. We may call it abnormal if we like, and it is true that we do not as yet know under what conditions it exists; but it is as much there as electrical communication, and just as the electrician does not create the viewless ripples which his delicate instruments can catch and record, but merely makes it a matter of mechanics to detect them, so the ripple of human intercommunication is undoubtedly there;

and when we have discovered what its laws are, we shall probably find that it underlies many things, such as enthusiasms, movements, the spirit of a community, patriotism, martial ardour, which now appear to us to be isolated and mysterious phenomena.

But there is a larger thing than even that behind. In humanity we have merely a certain portion of this large life, which may spread for all we know beyond the visible universe, globed and bounded, like the spray of a fountain, into little separate individualities. Some of the urgent inexplicable emotions which visit us from time to time, immense, far-reaching, mysterious, are, I believe with all my heart, the pulsations of this vast life outside us, stirring for an instant the silence of our sleeping spirit. It is possible, I cannot help feeling, that those people live the best of all possible lives who devote themselves to receiving these pulsations. It may well be that in following anxiously the movement of the world, in giving ourselves to politics or business, or technical religion, or material cares, we are but delaying the day of our freedom by throwing ourselves intently into our limitations, and forgetting the wider life. It may be that the life which Christ seems to have suggested as the type of Christian life—the life of constant prayer, simple and kindly relations, indifference to worldly conditions, absence of ambitions, fearlessness, sin-

cerity—may be the life in which we can best draw near to the larger spirit—for Christ spoke as one who knew some prodigious secret, as one in whose soul the larger life leapt and plunged like fresh sea-billows; who was incapable of sin and even of temptation, because His soul had free and open contact with the all-pervading spirit, and to whom the human limitations were no barrier at all.

We do not know as yet the mechanical means, so to speak, by which the connection can be established, the door set wide. But we can at least open our soul to every breathing of divine influences; and when the great wind rises and thunders in our spirits, we can see that no claim of business, or weakness, or comfort, or convention shall hinder us from admitting it.

And thus when one of these sweet, high, uplifting thoughts draws near and visits us, we can but say, as the child Samuel said in the dim-lit temple, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." The music comes upon the air, in faint and tremulous gusts; it dies away across the garden, over the far hill-side, into the cloudless sky; but we have heard; we are not the same; we are transfigured.

Why then, lastly, it may be asked, do these experiences befall us so faintly, so secretly, so seldom; if it is the true life that beats so urgently into our souls, why are we often so careful and

disquieted, why do we fare such long spaces without the heavenly vision, why do we see, or seem to see, so many of our fellows to whom such things come rarely or not at all? I cannot answer that; yet I feel that the life is there; and I can but fall back upon the gentle words of the old saint, who wrote: "I know not how it is, but the more the realities of heaven are clothed with obscurity, the more they delight and attract; and nothing so much heightens longing as such tender refusal."

XVIII

THE LOVE OF GOD

How strange it is that what is often the latest reward of the toiler after holiness, the extreme solace of the outwearied saint, should be too often made the first irksome article of a childish creed! To tell a child that it is a duty to love God better than father or mother, sisters and brothers, better than play, or stories, or food, or toys, what a monstrous thing is that! It is one of the things that make religion into a dreary and darkling shadow, that haunts the path of the innocent. The child's love is all for tangible, audible, and visible things. Love for him means kind words and smiling looks, ready comfort and lavished kisses; the child does not even love things for being beautiful, but for being what they *are*—curious, characteristic, interesting. He loves the odd frowsy smell of the shut-up attic, the bright ugly ornaments of the chimney-piece, the dirt of the street. He has no sense of critical taste. Besides, words mean so little to him, or even bear quaint, fantastic associations, which no one can divine, and which he himself is unable to express; he has no notion of

an abstract, essential, spiritual thing, apart from what is actual to his senses. And then into this little concrete mind, so full of small definite images, so faltering and frail, is thrust this vast, remote notion—that he is bound to love something hidden and terrible, something that looks at him from the blank sky when he is alone among the garden beds, something which haunts empty rooms and the dark brake of the woodland. Moreover, a child, with its preternatural sensitiveness to pain, its bewildered terror of punishment, learns, side by side with this, that the God Whom he is to love thus tenderly is the God Who lays about Him so fiercely in the Old Testament, slaying the innocent with the guilty, merciless, harsh, inflicting the irreparable stroke of death, where a man would be concerned with desiring amendment more than vengeance. The simple questions with which the man Friday poses Robinson Crusoe, and to which he receives so ponderous an answer, are the questions which naturally arise in the mind of any thoughtful child. Why, if God be so kind and loving, does He not make an end of evil at once? Yet, because such questions are unanswerable by the wisest, the child is, for the convenience of his education, made to feel that he is wicked if he questions what he is taught. How many children will persevere in the innocent scepticism which is so natural and so desirable, under a sense of dis-

approval? One of my own earliest experiences in the ugly path of religious gloom was that I recognised quite clearly to myself that I did not love God at all. I did not know Him, I had no reason to think Him kind; He was angry with me, I gathered, if I was ill-tempered or untruthful. I was well enough aware by childish instinct that my mother did not cease to love me when I was naughty, but I could not tell about God. And yet I knew that, with His terrible power of knowing everything, He was well aware that I did not love Him. It was best to forget about Him as much as possible, for it spoiled one's pleasure to think about it. All the little amusements and idle businesses that were so dear to me, He probably disapproved of them all, and was only satisfied when I was safe at my lessons or immured in church. Sunday was the sort of day He liked, and how I detested it!—the toys put away, little ugly books about the Holy Land to read, an air of deep dreariness about it all. Thus does religion become a weariness from the outset.

How slowly, and after what strange experience, by what infinite delay of deduction, does the love of God dawn upon the soul! Even then how faint and subtle an essence it is! In deep anxiety, under unbearable strain, in the grip of a dilemma of which either issue seems intolerable, in weariness of life, in hours of flagging vitality, the mighty tide begins to flow strongly and tranquilly into the

soul. One did not make oneself; one did not make one's sorrows, even when they arose from one's own weakness and perversity. There was a meaning, a significance about it all; one was indeed on pilgrimage; and then comes the running to the Father's knee, and the casting oneself in utter broken weakness upon the one Heart that understands perfectly and utterly, and which does, which must, desire the best and truest. "Give me courage, hope, confidence," says the desolate soul.

> "I can endure Thy bitterest decrees,
> If *certain* of Thy Love."

How would one amend all this if one had the power? Alas! it could only be by silencing all stupid and clumsy people, all rigid parents, all diplomatic priests, all the horrible natures who lick their lips with a fierce zest over the pains that befall the men with whom they do not agree. I would teach a child, in defiance even of reason, that God is the one Power that loves and understands him through thick and thin; that He punishes with anguish and sorrow; that He exults in forgiveness and mercy; that He rejoices in innocent happiness; that He loves courage, and brightness, and kindness, and cheerful self-sacrifice; that things mean, and vile, and impure, and cruel, are things that He does not love to punish, but sad and soiling stains that He beholds with shame and tears. This, it seems to me, is the

Gospel teaching about God, impossible only because of the hardness of our hearts. But if it *were* possible, a child might grow to feel about sin, not that it was a horrible and unpardonable failure, a thing to afflict oneself drearily about, but that it was rather a thing which, when once spurned, however humiliating, could minister to progress, in a way in which untroubled happiness could not operate—to be forgotten, perhaps, but certainly to be forgiven; a privilege rather than a hindrance, a gate rather than a barrier; a shadow upon the path, out of which one would pass, with such speed as one might, into the blitheness of the free air and the warm sun. I remember a terrible lecture which I heard as a little bewildered boy at school, anxious to do right, terrified of oppression, and coldness, and evil alike; given by a worthy Evangelical clergyman, with large spectacles, and a hollow voice, and a great relish for spiritual terrors. The subject was "the exceeding sinfulness of sin," a proposition which I now see to be as true as if one lectured on the exceeding carnality of flesh. But the lecture spoke of the horrible and filthy corruption of the human heart, its determined delight in wallowing in evil, its desperate wickedness. I believed it, dully and hopelessly, as a boy believes what is told him by a voluble elderly person of obvious respectability. But what a detestable theory of life, what an ugly picture of Divine incompetence!

Of course there are abundance of facts in the world which look like anything but love;—the ruthless and merciless punishment of carelessness and ignorance, the dark laws of heredity, the wastefulness and cruelty of disease, the dismal acquiescence of stupid, healthy, virtuous persons, without sympathy or imagination, in the hardships which they were strong enough to bear unscathed. One of the prime terrors of religion is the thought of the heavy-handed, unintelligent, tiresome men who would make it a monopoly if they could, and bear it triumphantly away from the hands of modest, humble, quiet, and tender-hearted people, chiding them as nebulous optimists.

Who are the people in this short life of ours whom one remembers with deep and abiding gratitude? Not those who have rebuked, and punished, and satirised, and humiliated us, striking down the stricken, and flattening the prostrate —but the people who have been patient with us, and kind, who have believed in us, and comforted us, and welcomed us, and forgiven us everything; who have given us largely of their love, who have lent without requiring payment, who have given us emotional rather than prudential reasons, who have cared for us, not as a duty but by some divine instinct, who have made endless excuses for us, believing that the true self was there and would emerge, who have pardoned our misdeeds and forgotten our meannesses.

This is what I would believe of God—that He is not our censorious and severe critic, but our champion and lover, not loving us in spite of what we are, but because of what we are; Who in the days of our strength rejoices in our joy, and does not wish to overshadow it, like the conscientious human mentor, with considerations that we must yet be withered like grass; and Who, when the youthful ebullience dies away, and the spring grows weak, and we wonder why the zest has died out of simple pleasures, out of agreeable noise and stir, is still with us, reminding us that the wisdom we are painfully and surely gaining is a deeper and more lasting quality than even the hot impulses of youth.

Once in my life have I conceived what might have been, if I had had the skill to paint it, an immortal picture. It was thus. I was attending a Christmas morning service in a big parish church. I was in a pew facing east; close to me, in a transept, in a pew facing sideways, there sat a little old woman, who had hurried in just before the service began. She was a widow, living, I afterwards learnt, in an almshouse hard by. She was old and feeble, very poor, and her life had been a series of calamities, relieved upon a background of the hardest and humblest drudgery. She had lost her husband years ago by a painful and terrible illness. She had lost her children one by one; she was alone in the world, save for a few

distant and indifferent relatives. To get into the almshouse had been for her a stroke of incredible and inconceivable good fortune. She had a single room, with a tiny kitchen off it. She had very little to say for herself; she could hardly read. No one took any particular interest in her; but she was a kindly, gallant, unselfish old soul, always ready to bear a hand, full of gratitude for the kindnesses she had received—and God alone knows how few they had been.

She had a small, ugly, homely face, withered and gnarled hands; and she was dressed that day in a little old bonnet of unheard-of age, and in dingy, frowsy black clothes, shiny and creased, that came out of their box perhaps half-a-dozen times a year.

But this morning she was in a festal mood. She had tidied up her little room; she was going to have a bit of meat for dinner, given her by a neighbour. She had been sent a Christmas card that morning, and had pored over it with delight. She liked the stir and company of the church, and the cheerful air of the holly-berries. She held her book up before her, though I do not suppose she was even at the right page. She kept up a little faint cracked singing in her thin old voice; but when they came to the hymn "Hark, the herald angels sing," which she had always known from childhood, she lifted up her head and sang more courageously:

"Join the triumph of the skies!
With the angelic host proclaim,
Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

It was then that I had my vision. I do not know why, but at the sight of the wrinkled face and the sound of the plaintive uplifted voice, singing such words, a sudden mist of tears came over my eyes. Then I saw that close behind the old dame there stood a very young and beautiful man. I could see the fresh curling hair thrown back from the clear brow. He was clothed in a dim robe, of an opalescent hue and misty texture, and his hands were clasped together. It seemed that he sang too; but his eyes were bent upon the old woman with a look, half of tender amusement, and half of unutterable lovingness. The angelic host! This was one of that bright company indeed, going about the Father's business, bringing a joyful peace into the hearts of those among whom he moved. And of all the worshippers in that crowded church he had singled out the humblest and simplest for his friend and sister. I saw no more that day, for the lines of that presence faded out upon the air in the gleams of the frosty sunshine that came and went among the pillars. But if I could have painted the scene, the pure, untroubled face so close to the old worn features, the robes of light side by side with the dingy human vesture, it would be a picture that no living eye that had rested on it should forget.

Alas, that one cannot live in moments of inspiration like these! As life goes on, and as we begin perhaps to grow a little nearer to God by faith, we are confronted in our own lives, or in the life of one very near us, by some intolerable and shameful catastrophe. A careless sin makes havoc of a life, and shadows a home with shame; or some generous or unselfish nature, useful, beneficent, urgently needed, is struck down with a painful and hopeless malady. This too, we say to ourselves, must come from God; He might have prevented it if He had so willed. What are we to make of it? How are we to translate into terms of love what seems like an act of tyrannous indifference, or deliberate cruelty? Then, I think, it is well to remind ourselves that we can never know exactly the conditions of any other human soul. How little we know of our own! How little we could explain our case to another, even if we were utterly sincere! The weaknesses of our nature are often, very tenderly I would believe, hidden from us; we think ourselves sensitive and weak, when in reality we are armed with a stubborn breastplate of complacency and pride; or we think ourselves strong, only because the blows of circumstance have been spared us. The more one knows of the most afflicted lives, the more often the conviction flashes across us that the affliction is not a wanton outrage, but a delicately adjusted treatment. I remember once that a friend of mine

had sent him a rare plant, which was set in a big flower-pot, close to a fountain-basin. It never throve; it lived indeed, putting out in the spring a delicate stunted foliage, though my friend, who was a careful gardener, could never divine what ailed it. He was away for a few weeks, and the day after he was gone, the flower-pot was broken by a careless garden-boy, who wheeled a barrow roughly past it; the plant, earth and all, fell into the water; the boy removed the broken pieces of the pot, and seeing that the plant had sunk to the bottom of the little pool, never troubled his head to fish it out. When my friend returned, he noticed one day in the fountain a new and luxuriant growth of some unknown plant. He made careful inquiries and found out what had happened. It then came out that the plant was in reality a water-plant, and that it had pined away in the stifling air for want of nourishment, perhaps dimly longing for the fresh bed of the pool.

Even so has it been, times without number, with some starving and thirsty soul, that has gone on feebly trying to live a maimed life, shut up in itself, ailing, feeble. There has descended upon it what looks at first sight like a calamity, some affliction unaccountable and irreparable; and then it proves that this was the one thing needed; that sorrow has brought out some latent unselfishness, or suffering energised some unused faculty of strength and patience.

But even if it is not so, if we cannot trace in our own lives or the lives of others the beneficent influence of suffering, we can always take refuge in one thought. We can see that the one mighty and transforming power on earth is the power of love; we see people make sacrifices, not momentary sacrifices, but lifelong patient renunciations, for the sake of one whom they love; we see a great and passionate affection touch into being a whole range of unsuspected powers; we see men and women utterly unconscious of pain and weariness, utterly unaware that they are acting without a thought of self, if they can but soothe the pain of one dear to them, or win a smile from beloved lips; it is not that the selfishness, the indolence, is not there, but it is all borne away upon a mighty stream, as the river-wrack spins upon the rising flood.

If then this marvellous, this amazing power of love can cause men to make, with joy and gladness, sacrifices of which in their loveless days they would have deemed themselves and confessed themselves wholly incapable, can we not feel with confidence that the power, which lies thus deepest in the heart of the world, lies also deepest in the heart of God, of Whom the world is but a faint reflection? It cannot be otherwise. We may sadly ponder, indeed, why the love that has been, or that might have been, the strength of weary lives should be withdrawn or sternly withheld, but

we need not be afraid, if we have one generous impulse for another, if we ever put aside a delight that may please or attract us, for the sake of one who expects or would value any smallest service—and there are few who cannot feel this—we need not then, I say, doubt that the love which we desire, and which we have somehow missed or lost, is there waiting for us, ours all the time, if we but knew it.

And even if we miss the sweet influence of love in our lives, is there any one who has not, in solitude and dreariness, looked back upon the time when he was surrounded by love and opportunities of love, in childhood or in youth, with a bitter regret that he did not make more of it when it was so near to him, that he was so blind and selfish, that he was not a little more tender, a little more kind? I will speak frankly for myself and say that the memories which hurt me most, when I stumble upon them, are those of the small occasions when I showed myself perverse and hard; when eyes, long since closed, looked at me with a pathetic expectancy; when I warded off the loving impulse by some jealous sense of my own rights, some peevish anger at a fancied injustice; when I stifled the smile and withheld the hand, and turned away in silence, glad, in that poisonous moment, to feel that I could at all events inflict that pain in base requital. One may know that it is all forgiven, one may be sure

that the misunderstanding has faded in the light of the other dawn, but still the cold base shadow, the thought of one's perverse cruelty, strikes a gloom upon the mind.

But with God, when one once begins to draw near to Him, one need have no such poignant regrets or overshadowing memories; one may say to Him in one's heart, as simply as a child, that He knows what one has been and is, what one might have been and what one desires to be; and one may cast oneself at His feet in the overwhelming hope that He will make of oneself what He would have one to be.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, it is not the poor wretch himself, whose miserable motive for returning is plainly indicated — that instead of pining in cold and hunger he may be warmed and clothed—who is the hero of the story; still less is it the hard and virtuous elder son. The hero of the tale is the patient, tolerant, loving father, who had acted, as a censorious critic might say, foolishly and culpably, in supplying the dissolute boy with resources, and taking him back without a word of just reproach. A sad lack of moral discipline, no doubt! If he had kept the boy in fear and godliness, if he had tied him down to honest work, the disaster need never have happened. Yet the old man, who went so often at sundown, we may think, to the crest of the hill, from which he could see the long road winding

over the plain to the far-off city, the road by which he had seen his son depart, light-heartedly and full of fierce joyful impulses, and along which he was to see the dejected figure, so familiar, so sadly marred, stumbling home—he is the master-spirit of the sweet and comforting scene. His heart is full of utter gladness, for the lost is found. He smiles upon the servants; he bids the household rejoice; he can hardly, in his simple joy of heart, believe that the froward elder brother is vexed and displeased; and his words of entreaty that the brother, too, will enter into the spirit of the hour, are some of the most pathetic and beautiful ever framed in human speech: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine; it was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again, and was lost, and is found."

And this is, after all, the way in which God deals with us. He gives us our portion to spend as we choose; He holds nothing back; and when we have wasted it and brought misery upon ourselves, and return to Him, even for the worst of reasons, He has not a word of rebuke or caution; He is simply and utterly filled with joy and love. There are a thousand texts that would discourage us, would bid us believe that God deals hardly with us, but it is men that deal hardly with us, it is we that deal hardly with ourselves. This story, which is surely the most beautiful story

in the world, gives us the deliberate thought of the Saviour, the essence of His teaching; and we may fling aside the bitter warnings of jealous minds, and cast ourselves upon the supreme hope that, if only we will return, we are dealt with even more joyfully than if we had never wandered at all.

And then perhaps at last, when we have peeped again and again, through loss and suffering, at the dark background of life; when we have seen the dreariest corner of the lonely road, where the path grows steep and miry, and the light is veiled by scudding cloud and dripping rain, there begins to dawn upon us the sense of a beautiful and holy patience, the thought that these grey ashes of life, in which the glowing cinders sink, which once were bright with leaping flame, are not the end —that the flame and glow are there, although momently dispersed. They have done their work; one is warmed and enlivened; one can sit still, feeding one's fancy on the lapsing embers, just as one saw pictures in the fire as an eager child long ago. That high-hearted excitement and that curiosity have faded. Life is very different from what we expected, more wholesome, more marvellous, more brief, more inconclusive; but there is an intenser, if quieter and more patient, curiosity to wait and see what God is doing for us; and the orange stain and green glow of the sunset, though colder and less jocund, is yet a far more

mysterious, tender, and beautiful thing than the steady glow of the noonday sun, when the shining flies darted hither and thither, and the roses sent out their rich fragrance. There is fragrance still, the fragrance of the evening flowers, where the western windows look across the misty fields to the thickening shadows of the tall trees. But there is something that speaks in the gathering gloom, in the darkening sky with its flush of crimson fire, that did not speak in the sun-warmed garden and the dancing leaves; and what speaks is the mysterious love of God, a thing sweeter and more remote than the urgent bliss of the fiery noon, full of delicate mysteries and appealing echoes. We have learnt that the darkness is no darkness with Him; and the soul which beat her wings so passionately in the brighter light of the hot morning, now at last begins to dream of whither she is bound, and the dear shade where she will fold her weary wing.

How often has the soul in her dreariness cried out, "One effort more!" But that is done with for ever. She is patient now; she believes at last; she labours no longer at the oar, but she is borne upon the moving tide; she is on her way to the deep Heart of God.

EPILOGUE

I HAVE wandered far enough in my thought, it would seem, from the lonely grange in its wide pastures, and the calm expanse of fen; and I should wish once more to bring my reader back home with me to the sheltered garden, and the orchard knee-deep in grass, and the embowering elms; for there is one word more to be said, and that may be best said at home; though our experience is not limited by time or place. It was on the lonely ridge, strewn with boulders and swept by night-winds, when the darkness closed in drearily about him, that Jacob, a homeless exile, in the hour of his utmost desolation, saw the ladder whose golden head was set at the very foot of God, thronged with bright messengers of strength and hope. And again it was in the familiar homestead, with every corner rich in gentle memories, that the spirit of terror turned the bitter stream of anguish, as from the vent of some thunderous cloud, upon the sad head of Job. We may turn a corner in life, and be confronted perhaps with an uncertain shape of grief and despair, whom we would fain banish from our

shuddering sight, perhaps with some solemn form of heavenly radiance, whom we may feel reluctant in our unworthiness to entertain. But in either case, such times as those, when we wrestle all night with the angel, not knowing if he wishes us well or ill, ignorant of his name and his mien alike, are better than hours spent in indolent contentment, in the realisation of our placid and petty designs. For, after all, it is the quality rather than the quantity of our experience that matters; it is easy enough to recognise that, when we are working light-heartedly and eagerly at some brave design, and seeing the seed we plant springing up all about us in fertile rows in the garden of God. But what of those days when our lot seems only to endure, when we can neither scheme nor execute, when the old volubility and vitality desert us, and our one care is just to make our dreary presence as little of a burden and a shadow as possible to those whom we love? We must then remind ourselves, not once or twice, that nothing can separate us from the Father of all, even though our own wilfulness and perversity may have drawn about us a cloud of sorrow. We are perhaps most in God's mind when we seem most withdrawn from Him. He is nearer us when we seek for Him and cannot find Him, than when we forget Him in laughter and self-pleasing. And we must remember too that it is neither faithful nor fruitful to abide wilfully in sadness, to clasp our cares close, to

luxuriate in them. There is a beautiful story of Mrs. Charles Kingsley, who long survived her husband. Never perhaps had two souls been united by so close a bond of chivalry and devotion. "Whenever I find myself thinking too much about Charles," she said in the days of her grief, "I find and read the most sensational novel I can. People may think it heartless, but hearts were given us to love with, not to break." And we must deal with our sorrows as we deal with any other gift of God, courageously and temperately, not faint-heartedly or wilfully; not otherwise can they be blest to us. We must not pettishly reject consolation and distraction. Pain is a great angel, but we must wrestle with him, until he bless us! and the blessings he can bring us are first a wholesome shame at our old selfish ingratitude in the untroubled days, when we took care and pleasure greedily; and next, if we meet him faithfully, he can make our heart go out to all our brothers and sisters who suffer in this brief and troubled life of ours. For we are here to learn something, if we can but spell it out; and thus it is morbid to indulge regrets and remorse too much over our failures and mistakes; for it is through them that we learn. We must be as brave as we can, and dare to grudge no pang that brings us nearer to the reality of things.

Reality! that is the secret; for we who live in dreams, who pursue beauty, who are haunted as

by a passion for that sweet quality that thrills alike in the wayside flower and the orange pomp of the setting sun, that throbs in written word and uttered melody, that calls to us suddenly and secretly in the glance of an eye and the gesture of a hand, —we, I say, who discern these gracious motions, tend to live in them too luxuriously, to idealise life, to make out of our daily pilgrimage, our goings and comings, a golden untroubled picture; it need not be a false or a base effort to escape from what is sordid or distasteful; but for all that we run a sore risk in yielding too placidly to our visions; and as, with the Lady of Shalott, it may be well for us if our woven web be rent aside, and our magic mirror broken; nay, even if death comes to us at the close of the mournful song. Thus then we draw near and look reluctant and dismayed into the bare truth of things. We see, it may be, our poor pretences tossed aside, and the embroidered robe in which we have striven to drape our leanness torn from us; but we must gaze as steadily as we can, and pray that the vision be not withdrawn till it has wrought its perfect work within us; and then, with energies renewed, we may set out again on pilgrimage, happy in this, that we no longer mistake the arbour of refreshment for the goal of our journey, or the quiet house of welcome, that receives us in the hour of weariness, for the heavenly city, with all its bright mansions and radiant palaces.

It is experience that matters, as I have said; not what we do, but how we do it. The material things that we collect about us in our passage through life, that we cling to so pathetically, and into which something of our very selves seems to pass, these things are little else than snares and hindrances to our progress—like the clay that sticks to the feet of the traveller, like the burden of useless things that he carries painfully with him, things which he cannot bring himself to throw away because they might possibly turn out to be useful, and which meanwhile clank and clatter fruitlessly about the laden beast, and weigh him down. What we have rather to do is to disengage ourselves from these things: from the money which we do not need, but which may help us some day; from the luxuries we do not enjoy; from the furniture we trail about with us from home to home. All those things get a hold of us and tie us to earth, even when the associations with them are dear and tender enough. The mistake we make is not in loving them—they are or can be signs to us of the love and care of God—but we must refrain from loving the possession of them.

Take, for instance, one of the least mundane of things, the knowledge we painfully acquire, and the possession of which breeds in us such lively satisfaction. If it is our duty to acquire knowledge and to impart it, we must acquire it; but it

is the faithfulness with which we toil, not the accumulations we gain that are blessed to us—"knowledge comes but wisdom lingers," says the poet—and it is the heavenly wisdom of which we ought to be in search; for what remains to us of our equipment, when we part from the world and migrate elsewhere, is not the actual stuff that we have collected, whether it be knowledge or money, but the patience, the diligence, the care which we have exercised in gaining these things, the character, as affected by the work we have done; but our mistake is to feel that we are idle and futile, unless we have tangible results to show; when perhaps the hours in which we sat idle, out of misery or mere feebleness, are the most fruitful hours of all for the growth of the soul.

The great savant dies. What is lost? Not a single fact or a single truth, but only his apprehension, his collection of certain truths; not a single law of nature perishes or is altered thereby. We measure worth by prominence and fame; but the destiny of the simplest and vilest of the human race is as august, as momentous as the destiny of the mightiest king or conqueror; it is not our admiration of each other that weighs with God, but our nearness to, our dependence on Him. Yet, even so, we must not deceive ourselves in the matter. We must be sure that it is the peace of God that we indeed desire, and not merely a refined kind of leisure; that we are in search of

simplicity, and not merely afraid of work. We must not glorify a mild spectatorial pleasure by the name of philosophy, or excuse our indolence under the name of contemplation. We must abstain deliberately, not tamely hang back; we must desire the Kingdom of Heaven for itself, and not for the sake of the things that are added if we seek it. If the Scribes and Pharisees have their reward for ambition and self-seeking, the craven soul has its reward too, and that reward is a sick emptiness of spirit. And then if we have erred thus, if we have striven to pretend to ourselves that we were careless of the prize, when in reality we only feared the battle, what can we do? How can we repair our mistake? There is but one way; we can own the pitiful fault, and not attempt to glorify it; we can face the experience, take our petty and shameful wages and cast ourselves afresh, in our humiliation and weakness, upon God, rejoicing that we can at least feel the shame, and enduring the chastisement with patient hopefulness; for that very suffering is a sign that God has not left us to ourselves, but is giving us perforce the purification which we could not take to ourselves.

And even thus, life is not all an agony, a battle, an endurance; there are sweet hours of refreshment and tranquillity between the twilight and the dawn; hours when we can rest a little in the shadow, and see the brimming stream of life flowing quietly but surely to its appointed end.

I watched to-day an old shepherd, on a wide field, moving his wattled hurdles, one by one, in the slow, golden afternoon; and a whole burden of anxious thoughts fell off me for awhile, leaving me full of a quiet hope for an end which was not yet, but that certainly awaited me; of a day when I too might perhaps move as unreflectingly, as calmly, in harmony with the everlasting Will, as the old man moved about his familiar task. Why that harmony should be so blurred and broken, why we should leave undone the things that we desire to do, and do the things that we do not desire, that is still a deep and sad mystery; yet even in the hour of our utmost wilfulness, we can never wander beyond the range of the Will that has made us, and bidden us to be what we are. And thus as I sit in this low-lit hour, there steals upon the heart the message of hope and healing; the scent of the great syringa bush leaning out into the twilight, the sound of the fitful breeze laying here and there a caressing hand upon the leaves, the soft radiance of the evening star hung in the green spaces of the western sky, each and all blending into incommunicable dreams.

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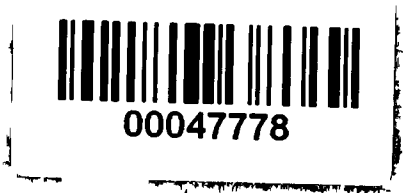
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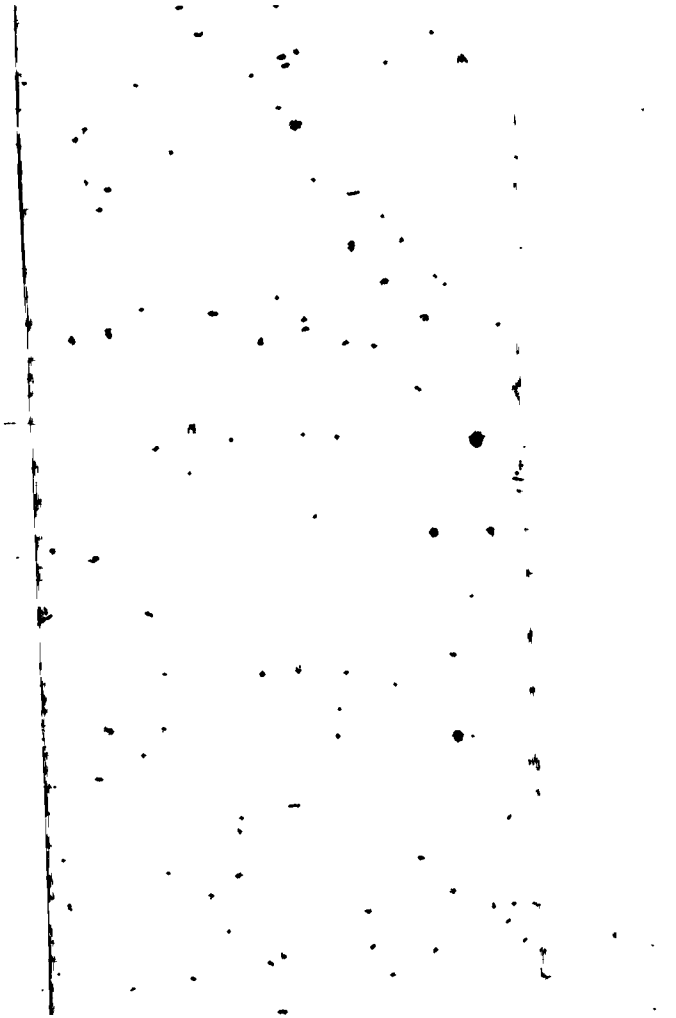

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